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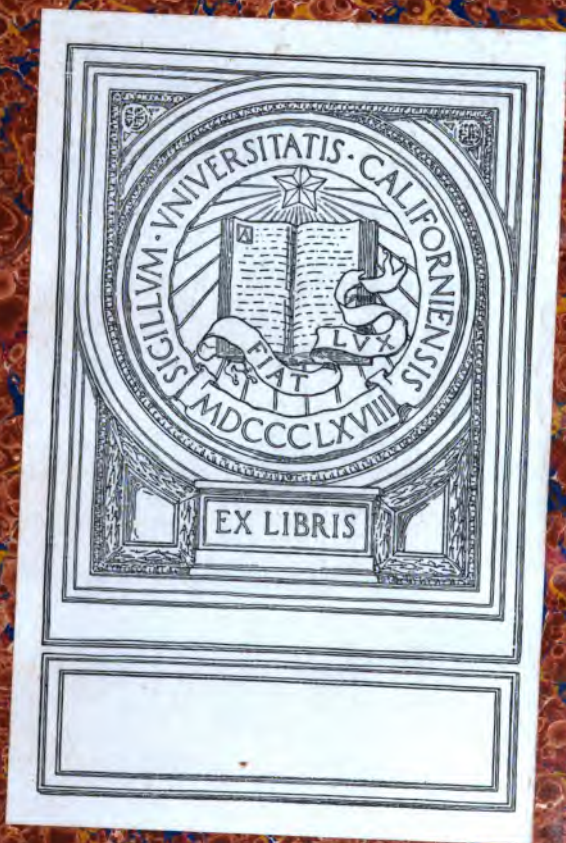


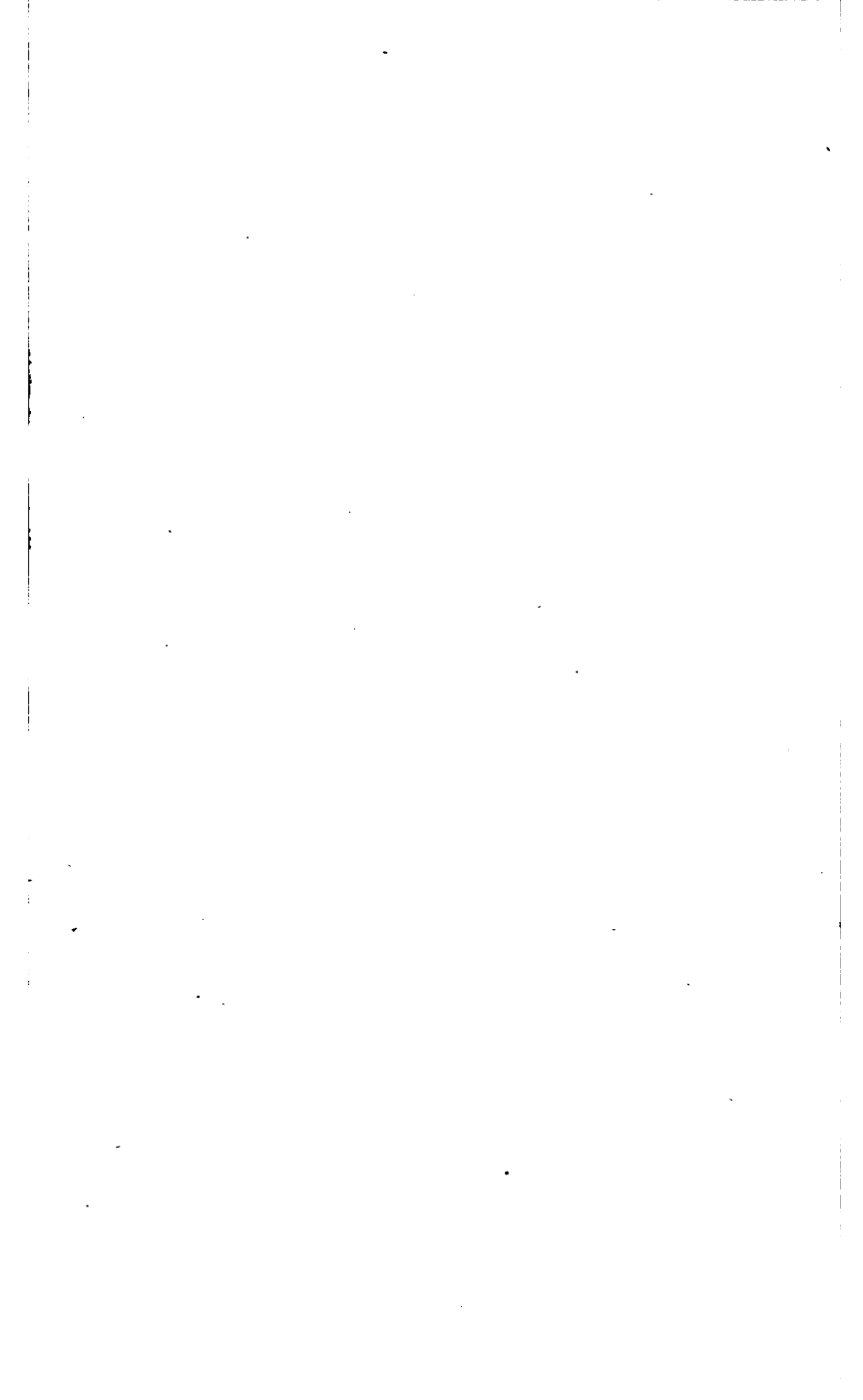
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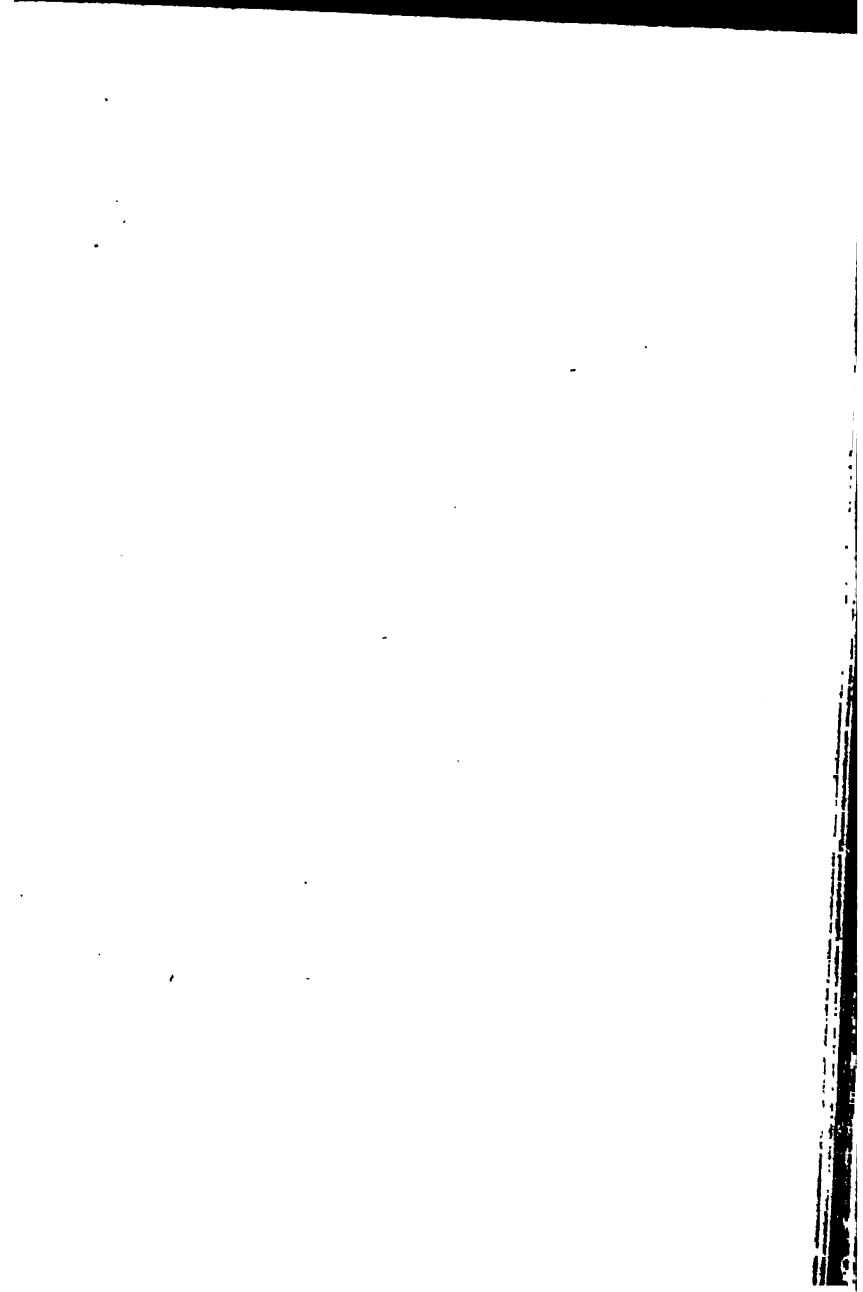
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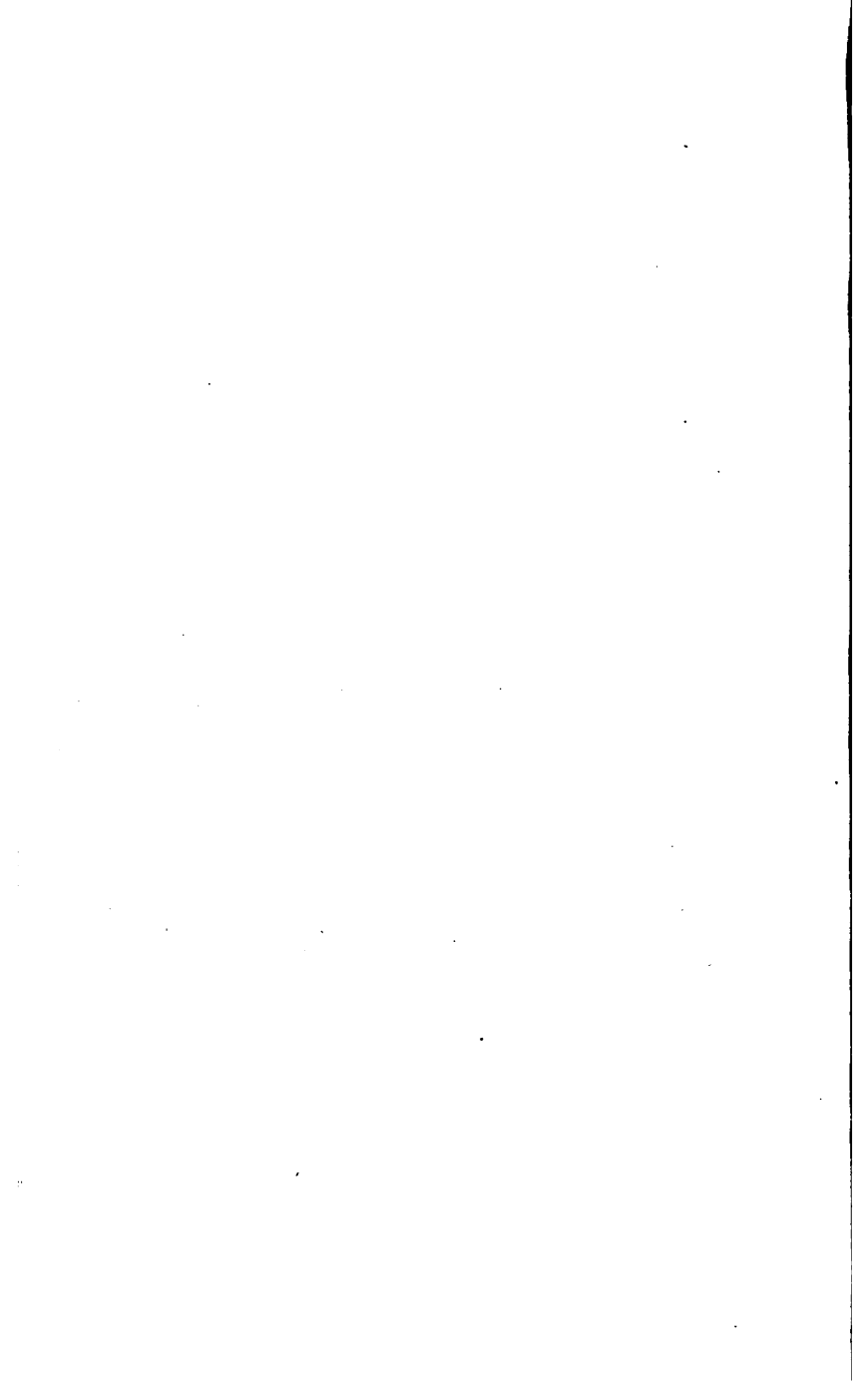
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Edwards, William

THE FIVE NIGHTS

OF

ST. ALBANS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

EDWARD
CALVERT

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH; AND
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TO VERN
ALBERT

THE
FIVE NIGHTS
OF
ST. ALBANS.

CHAPTER I.

THE moment Lacy was alone, his daughter entered the room. She advanced towards her father with an expression of chastened satisfaction in her countenance, not as if she rejoiced that he was safe, but as if she were thankful that he had been permitted to live another night. Her heart had received a reprieve only, not a full pardon. She kissed him tenderly as she exclaimed, "Thank Heaven, you are still preserved to me!"

VOL. II.

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"I thought you had retired to rest ere this," said Lacy.

"No," replied Helen; "I watched for your return, and now I have come to bid you good-night."

"Good night, then," replied her father; and he pressed her hand affectionately.

"And no more!" said Helen, with a sigh, as she arose to retire again.

"It is late," continued Lacy, "and sleep is stealing over me."

"I should be sleepy, too," answered Helen, "at this drowsy hour; but I know not what drug or opiate could make me so."

She leaned forward, and pressed her lips upon the forehead of her father. He felt a tear fall upon his cheek. He looked up; her eyes swam in the full flood of filial sorrow.

"Whence, whence, is this grief, my beloved child?" exclaimed Lacy, with a faltering voice, as he drew her to his bosom.

"Can you give me comfort?—can you give me hope?" she said, sobbing aloud.

"Yes, both,—if you will receive them."

"If!" responded Helen, and she sighed heavily—"if I will receive them!—" *'Give me food, or I die!'* cries the wretch, whose very entrails famine gnaws like a vulture. Would you say to such a one, *'yes, if you will eat?'* Why, his frantic prayer is for food, as my sad one is for comfort. Tell me, I implore you, then, what hath happened to-night, and I shall know what there is of comfort for me;—tell me, what is hereafter intended, and if hope lurk there, my poor heart will leap to meet it?"

Lacy could not resist this appeal. He made Helen again sit by him, and related to her all that had occurred in the Abbey, as well as the resolution which had been taken. She listened with profound attention, but the agitation of her feelings was manifest.

"So!" she exclaimed, when Lacy had concluded, "there is another!"

"Did I not say," observed her father, "that Clayton had fallen into a fit merely, and that, once before, he had the like visitation?"

Helen smiled incredulously, almost scornfully, at this description of Clayton's situation.

“And now,” continued he, “have I not given you both present comfort and future hope?”

“Neither!” said she. “That wretched man, whom I know not, but pity, will never look upon this world again. And oh! would I were as sure he is the last, as I am that the cause which shall re-assemble you is at hand!”

“And if it be”—replied Lacy.

“And if it be,” interrupted Helen, “the blood that shall flow, still runs warm in the living veins that must empty themselves, to glut the fell demon whose work all this is.”

“Tush, girl!” exclaimed Lacy; “you are getting fond. Your young imagination, heated by tales of goblins, and fairies, and the whole brood of the devil’s imps, plays tricks with your reason, and makes you fantastical. I am not the man to deny the thing that is, or to wrestle with the plain evidence of my senses; and I grant you, there is a something about this business which I do not comprehend, so quickly, as I should the movements of an army; but,

plague on't, I will not go to my nurse for the explanation."

Helen sighed. The argument (if so it might be called) between her and her father had now taken that turn which put an end to it. She knew how utterly ineffectual every attempt would be to work upon him, by a belief which was rooted in her own mind. When she had, sometimes, endeavoured to do so, he at first derided, but at last became almost angered with her earnest discourse—the more earnest, because she felt assured, if she could once shake his scepticism, she could then arm him, in some degree, against the danger he was braving with a defenceless hand. Her only remaining hope, therefore, was, that she might be able to reach his heart through those natural channels, which are rarely closed to the pleading of a child, even in the sternest bosoms; and never, where, as was Lacy's case, (who loved Helen with the whole affection of a father,) every feeling towards her was bound up in the desire to make her happy.

It happened, unfortunately, however, for

poor Helen, that in this affair of the abbey the veteran Lacy looked at it with a soldier's eye—that is, he could not altogether strip his participation in it of the soldier's honour. Others, might renounce the enterprise, and call it their humour, their inclination, or their dislike; but for him, there was no such license; so, at least, he construed his self-imposed duty, shrinking with feverish jealousy from the most remote possibility of fear being imputed as the motive. Let all the rest relinquish it, and, as has been seen, he was ready to join them; but to relinquish it singly—to leave all the rest—nay, to have deserted only one among them, while one remained firm, was a step which he could almost as easily have taken, as to have fled from his standard in the field. Hence it was, that for the first time in her life, the anxious, sorrowful, and supplicating Helen, had begged a boon—begged it too with many a bitter tear, and heart-sore sigh—only to have her importunities denied. Her father, indeed, never failed to soften denial by a frank confession of his reasons: but it is a cold consolation, when we

would prevent sorrow, to know only why we cannot.

Helen did not persist in her entreaties after what she considered as the almost harsh reply of her father; but at that instant her mind conceived a project, from the mere contemplation of which she derived comfort. It was suited to the intensity of her apprehensions for her father's safety, and to her strong persuasion of the nature of the peril which menaced him. It was no less suited to what had been the predominant character of her studies, and the wild fancies they had nurtured. She had often longed, when brooding over the mystic wonders of fairy or necromantic legends, to have the demonstration, the ocular evidence, of charms and spells, which had the reputed power of unfolding the future, and arresting the course of human events. More than once, indeed, in the midnight solitude of her chamber, she had trembled on the verge of proof, as she performed the imperfect rites which were familiar to her mind: and tokens of their limited potency had been manifested, in sounds and preter-

natural motions, which at once appalled and satisfied her curiosity. But these had hitherto been tried in the mere wantonness of inquisitive doubts; the desire, so natural to the human mind, of putting to the test its own credulity; the vagrant wish—no more—of just playing with the truth—if it were truth—and satisfied to know, from a little, that all was possible. She had now, however, a higher and a stronger motive, to go further; and her silent determination to do so was an infinite relief to her present feelings. She contented herself, therefore, with once more pressing her lips to those of her revered father, bade him “good night,” as if she had been suddenly convinced of the childishness of her fears, and taking her taper, hurried out of the room to meditate upon her new-born hopes. Lacy was overjoyed to observe the change; and, retiring to his own chamber, soon found that repose he needed.

Peverell, on his way home, called again at Clayton’s, where he found Peter Simcox still in attendance, and from whom he learned that

his friend continued in the same condition. There had, as yet, been no signs of returning animation ; “ but,” said the doctor, “ I am not without hope ; for though there be no change for the better, there is none for the worse : he still looks like one asleep only ; his cheeks retain their freshness, his lips their colour, his limbs their pliancy ; and the natural warmth hath not forsaken his body. Now, these are all probable, though not sure prognostics of recovery.”

When Peverell reached his own house, his man Francis met him with a strangely mysterious look and manner.

“ Here is one within,” said he, “ that will not, by any dint of persuasion, go ; though I have been two good hours trying my skill to that end.”

“ Who is it ?” inquired Peverell.

“ That, neither, can I not discover,” quoth Francis.” She knocked at the door—it might be something after eleven, perhaps near upon twelve—and when I opened it, she whips into the hall without saying a word, walks into every room

in the house—I following her, as a beadle follows a rogue, till he sees him beyond the parish bounds—and at last takes possession of your low chair, and, without so much as ‘by your leave,’ begins to wring her hands, and cry ‘Lord ! Lord !’—‘What do you want, good woman ?’ said I. But I might as well have addressed myself to the walls, for ‘Lord ! Lord !’ was all her moan.”

Peverell hastened into the room, and there he saw poor Madge—her face buried in her hands, rocking to and fro, weeping most piteously, and, as Francis had described, ever and anon calling upon the Lord, but in a tone of such utter wretchedness, that it pierced his very heart.

He spoke to her. She started up at the sound of his voice, looked at him, and then mournfully exclaimed, while she pointed to the ground—“They have buried her !”

“Then be comforted,” said Peverell, in a kind and soothing voice ; “your hardest trial is past.”

“What a churl, he was !” continued Madge,

not heeding the words of Peverell; "I only asked him to keep the grave open till to-morrow, and he denied me! Only till to-morrow,—for then, said I, the cold earth can cover us both. But he denied me! So I fell upon my knees, beside my Marian's grave, and prayed that he might never lose a child, to know that blessedness of sorrow which lies in the thought of soon sleeping with those we have loved and lost! It was very wrong in me, I know, to wish to call down such affliction on him—but he denied me,—and I had to hear the rattling dust fall upon her coffin—aye, and to see that dark, deep grave filled up; as if a mother might not have her own child!"

"Poor afflicted creature!" exclaimed Peverell, in a half whisper to himself.

"Yes!" said Madge, drying her tears with her hands. "Yes! I have walked with grief, for my companion in this world, through many a sad and weary hour. But I shook hands with her, and we parted, at the grave of Marian. I buried all my troubles there. What is the hour?"

“Hard upon two,” replied Peverell.

“Then I must be busy,” answered Madge, in a wild, hurried manner, and smiling at Peverell, with a look of much importance, as if what she had to do were some profound secret. “You’ll not betray me, if I tell you?” she continued, taking his hand—“Feel!” and she placed it on her heart. “One, two; one, two; one, two—and so it goes on; it cannot beat beyond two! Oh, God! what pain it is before it breaks!”

She now returned to the chair from which she had risen, at the sound of Peverell’s voice. He approached nearer; and (with a view rather to draw her gently from her own thoughts, than from any desire that she should leave his house,) he asked her “if she would go home?”

“Yes,” she replied; “bear with me yet a little while, and I’ll go. It is near the time I promised Marian, when last I kissed her wintry cheek, as she lay shrouded in her coffin; and I may not fail. Lord! Lord! what a troubled and a worthless world this seems to me now! A week ago, and the sun, and the moon, and

the stars, and the green earth, and all that was upon it, were dear to mine eyes ; and I should have wept to look my last at them ! But now, I behold nothing it contains, save my Marian's grave ! You will see *me* laid in it, for pity's sake—won't you ?”

“Aye,” said Peverell, “but that will be when I am grey, and thinking of my own : so, cheer up. He that shall toll the bell for thee, now sleeps in his cradle, I'll warrant.”

She beckoned Peverell to her, and taking his hand, she again placed it on her heart. A sad, melancholy smile played for a moment across her pale wrinkled face, and her glazed eyes kindled into a fleeting expression of frightful gladness, as she feebly exclaimed, “Do you feel ? One !—one !—one !—and hardly that. —I breathe only from here,” she continued, pointing to her throat. “Feel !—feel !—one !—one !—another !—how I gasp—see !—see—”

She ceased to speak ; the hand which retained Peverell's relaxed its hold—her head dropped—one long-drawn sigh was heaved—and poor Madge resigned a being touched with

sympathies and feelings not often found in natures of nobler quality, in the world's catalogue of nobility. If, among the thousand doors which death holds open for mortal man to pass through, ere he puts on immortality, there be one, the rarest of them all, for broken hearts, this hapless creature found it. A self-accusing spirit bowed her to the earth, with the sharpest of all griefs—a mother's anguish for an only child—lost to her, as gamesters lose fortunes—thrown away by her own hand.

Peverell was deeply affected by what he had witnessed. It was not merely that he was wholly unprepared for such a scene; but, he had, all along, felt a singular interest in the melancholy story of Madge, and he brushed away a few honest tears from his eyes, as he disengaged his hand from hers, which, though it was now lifeless, still held his where she had placed it, to feel her heart's dying throbs.

“I shall grow familiar with death,” he exclaimed to himself, while he quitted the chamber, to give some necessary directions to his man Francis in consequence of what had oc-

curred. "Kit Barnes—Wilkins—this miserable woman—and——" He paused; his tongue refused to pronounce the name of his friend, though it hung upon his lips. "The game is a-foot, the chase is hot—what deer falls next?"

Full of these pensive thoughts, he retired to bed; but they haunted him, and he could not sleep. The night had become tempestuous. The wind roared and whistled round the house—the rain dashed in gusty torrents against the casement—the thunder rolled at a distance—and, at intervals, some vivid flashes of lightning illumined the room. He lay, tossing from side to side, in feverish restlessness, for nearly an hour; but at length sunk into a disturbed slumber.

His waking meditations pursued him, but mingled with the fantastic stuff of which our dreams are composed. He thought he was in the Abbey—alone,—and in utter darkness. It was midnight—he heard the bell toll the hour—He had an obscure recollection that others had been there before him, and had all died; but it did not seem to him as if he had known them. He

felt that he was there to die too. Suddenly, a single ray of light, like a sunbeam, streamed through one of the windows. It was of dazzling splendour. While gazing at this beautiful object, which diffused its bright effulgence over the whole interior of the Abbey, he heard a loud laugh behind him. He turned round, and discovered that he was standing on the crumbling edge of a new-made grave, and that thousands of loathsome worms were crawling round him, and upon him. In vain he strove to quit his place. He had not power to move. He looked into the grave. At the bottom lay an open coffin, in which was a half-consumed body.—He knew it was the corpse of Marian. While yet gazing at it, a shadowy form glided past him—descended into the grave, and laid itself by the side of Marian. It was Madge. He thought he had never beheld an expression so heavenly as that which dwelt upon her features, when she once more folded her arms round the mouldering neck of her idiot girl. Another shadow passed—he knew it too—it was Kit Barnes!—Another!—it was Wilkins!—then another!—it was

Clayton, who smiled upon him. They all passed into this new-made grave, and then faded from his sight. Other shadows flitted along, but their faces were muffled in their shrouds, and he knew them not. Still the worms crawled over him, and covered his whole body, while he strove in vain to shake them off. At length the ray of light disappeared—he was in total darkness—he felt the cold slime of the worms upon his face and hands; they were creeping into his mouth—his stomach heaved—his very heart was bursting almost—he was chilled with horror at the thought of dropping into the grave, upon whose edge he stood writhing and trembling,—and, in the agony of his feelings, he awoke!

CHAPTER II.

It was day-light, when Peverell sprung from his bed and wandered into the fields, less refreshed, after such sleep as he had had, than when he went to rest. A night of storm and tempest had ushered in a fresh, sunny morning, which dressed the face of nature in loveliness and smiles. The lark carolled above his head, and its glad notes descended, like a rich stream of melody, from the clear blue ether in which it sported—the awakening song of other birds floated on the breeze; the low of cattle sounded from the green pastures; the trees and hedges reflected a thousand brilliant hues, as the sun-

beams played upon the rain-drops which quivered on their branches, and which contrasted beautifully with the various tints of the decaying foliage—shade softening into shade, with that mellow harmony of colour which proclaimed the mighty workmanship of Nature.

The cool air was most grateful to the fevered brow, and parched lips, of Peverell. His eyes gazed languidly, but delightedly, upon the bright landscape spread before him, and his body seemed to shake off the weariness that oppressed it, as he stepped along. He had gained the top of a slight eminence, from which he could see, at one view, the whole of the ancient town of St. Albans. Here and there columns of blue smoke, ascending from the roofs, and slowly wreathing themselves into broader but less distinct masses, till they were lost in the surrounding atmosphere, denoted that the little round of human life was recommencing. To sleep—to wake—to labour—to sleep again—and then again to wake and labour—writes the brief history of millions! In the distance, stood the lofty grey towers of the venerable Abbey, half veiled from the sight by a dewy mist, sent

up from the dank earth, while through its thin curling folds blazed the windows of the edifice, as the sun's rays fell upon them.

Peverell sunk into meditation, as he looked towards the Abbey. All that *had* occurred, all that he felt *must* yet occur, passed through his mind. It recalled, too, an imperfect and obscure recollection of his dream, and a slight shudder agitated him, while he remembered with what agony he had striven to shake off the lazy worms that crawled and hung about him. It was no wonder, he thought, that such a dream should shape itself to his sleeping fancy, when he considered what realities had engaged his waking moments.

He was still ruminating upon these things, and endeavouring to conjecture what might that day befall, to explain or increase the mysteries of the preceding ones, when his attention was excited by a small, black, shaggy-haired cur, which had couched itself before him, and now sat looking wistfully in his face, wagging its tail, as if asking to be noticed. Peverell had not observed it before ; but he called it to him,

and the animal bounded to his feet, where it crouched, and waited for further invitation to be familiar. Peverell spoke to it—patted its rough sides—played with its pendant ears, and was amused with its frolics, as it leaped about him, licked his hands, and, by a variety of sprightly antics, testified its joy at so friendly a reception.

“And where may you live?” said Peverell, looking round, expecting to see some cottage near—“or hast thou no home, nor any master, that thus, like the forlorn of man’s race, you cast yourself for protection upon the first stranger you meet?”

The cur stood still—pricked up its ears, and looked (as two-legged curs often do) as if it really understood what it heard. It then scampered off twenty or thirty yards—ran back—was off again, returned, and seemed, by its manner, to invite Peverell to follow. Peverell watched its motions for two or three minutes, and at length began to walk in a contrary direction. The cur snapped at his feet—bit the ground—jumped up against him, and at last seized hold of his cloak, and tried to drag him back. At

one time he was about to spurn it, but the animal crouched down, looked so imploringly in his face, and whined so piteously, that he could not find in his heart to strike.

“ Well !” exclaimed Peverell, good humouredly, “ every dog has his day—this shall be thine, thou peremptory knave !—There ! go on, and I’ll be close at your tail ; for, after all, it is indifferent to me which way I wander.”

He turned. The shaggy devil yelped with joy, and coursed along like a hare, but ever and anon looking back to see if he was followed. Peverell kept on, his eye fixed on his four-footed guide, while his thoughts dwelt upon far other matters. In this way he traversed several fields, crossed miry lanes, and even broke through two or three hedges ; till, at last, stopping and looking round, he no longer perceived the little, black, shaggy-haired cur ; but he heard him barking furiously on the other side of a fence. He proceeded onwards, ascended the bank, and was about to leap a ditch that stopped his further progress, when he saw a man lying on his face in the grass.

He cleared the ditch in an instant, and advancing towards the man, hailed him. No answer was returned. He approached nearer, and then he perceived that he was lying in a pool of gore. He turned him on his back. His throat was hideously mangled; the blood still bubbled from the gash that was across it, and he observed that in his half-clenched hands there were tufts of grass and earth, as if he had either struggled desperately with his assassin, or had died grievously hard. Peverell stood, for a moment, gazing on the shocking object that lay before him. The eyes were staring—the features distorted, and smeared with blood—the wound gaping; but the sun shone brightly—all nature smiled around—while a bloated toad, unscared by the presence of Peverell, was dabbling in, and sucking up, the clotted lumps that lay congealed upon the ground.

Peverell examined the body more attentively. It seemed to be that of a man somewhat advanced in years—perhaps, about forty; of middle stature, but large-limbed, and mus-

cular withal. His apparel, which was of russet, bespoke him of no wealthy or distinguished class. Yet he had a chain of gold round his neck, to which was suspended a cross, carved in solid crystal; and in his pocket was a purse, containing money. It was not to rifle him, therefore, concluded Peverell, that the foul deed had been perpetrated. He was lost in horror and amazement. He knew not what to do.

“Sagacious brute!” he exclaimed, turning round—but the cur was gone. He whistled—he called—it came not. “Strange!” he muttered to himself, as he stooped down to disengage the gold chain from the neck of the unfortunate man, and to possess himself of his purse, deeming it right thus to secure them, either as a means of identifying the slaughtered victim, or that they might be restored, hereafter, to whomsoever should appear as the lawful claimant of them.

While thus occupied, he was startled by the sound of approaching footsteps, and the rustling of silks. He looked round, and saw

a female, who was advancing along the path, across which lay the bleeding corpse. She was young, richly dressed, and dignified in her carriage. As she drew near, he stepped forward to meet her, desirous, if it might be, of saving her feelings from the shock which so frightful a spectacle must produce. She passed him in silence—trod close to the murdered man—gazed upon the body for an instant, and then veiling her face, went on. Peverell watched her with silent astonishment, till an intervening grove of trees concealed her from his sight.

He now resolved to return forthwith to the town, communicate what had happened to the mayor, and leave in his hands the further inquiry into this dismal tragedy. He was about to quit the spot, when his eye caught the figure of a man, crossing the adjoining field. He knew him instantly. It was John Wintour, who was returning from a small farm which he rented hard by, and whither he had been thus early to give directions to his labour-

ers. Peverell shouted lustily, and mine host stopped. Peverell waved his cap, and mine host straight turned his steps to where Peverell was standing. He hastened forwards, and soon arrived; but the instant he cast his eyes upon the body, he exclaimed, "'Tis Fortescue! he who yesterday brought you the mysterious scroll. I know him by his dress, and that scar beneath the eye, disfigured as his features are now."

"Had he a purse like this?" said Peverell, holding up the one he had taken from his pocket.

"Aye, marry had he," quoth Wintour; "and out of it he paid me for all he ate and drank, save his last pot of ale."

"And a chain, like this, too?" continued Peverell.

"I marked not the chain," replied Wintour, "but the purse had a special attraction for my observation: I could depose to it upon my sworn oath. And there is his knotted staff, of tough oaken wood," continued mine host, "lying by his side, which I noted while he

sat in my house, and thought it a right trusty weapon for the hand of a lonely foot traveller. But, alas ! it seems to have stood him in little stead."

"Look at this purse again," said Peverell anxiously : "look at it well ; consider his dress attentively, his figure, his make, that scar, that staff ; in short, any and every thing about him, which may help to confirm, or suffice to destroy, your declared delief, that he is Fortescue."

"I will do as you desire," said Wintour ;
"but if I know myself, I know him."

He picked up the staff, and examined it—surveyed his apparel—looked at the scar, which was just under the right eye, and somewhat remarkable in appearance — took the purse in his hand, — looked at that — and then deliberately pronounced the words, "I am right. But soft ! I pray you," he continued ; "it hath come into my head this instant. I remember, twice, on his turning out the coin from this purse, to pay his score, a small gold signet ap-

peared among the money. Look, you, if such a thing be here."

Peverell emptied the contents of the purse into his hand. The signet Wintour spoke of, rolled out the last.

"I am satisfied," said Peverell. "I am fully satisfied—but—" He paused. He felt that Wintour was not the man to whom it would be either prudent, or of any advantage, to impart the thoughts which now crowded upon his mind. "Let us to the town," he continued. "However it hath chanced that this man hath perished, our clear course is to make it known to the mayor, and leave him to direct such further inquiry as may be meet."

They left the spot, and proceeded towards the town. Peverell was surprised to find that he had strayed to a distance of nearly three miles. He scarcely spoke to Wintour, except to tell him of the death of Madge, and to express a hope that he should find Clayton recovered. Mine host's tongue went as nimbly as his feet, which took three steps for each one of Peverell's; but though he talked of every thing

—the Abbey, and his own farm—Madge, and a fine brindled cow—Clayton, and a stack of two years old hay, which he expected to sell next market day—Fortescue, and a valuable boar pig that had strayed the night before—still he could not engage his companion in any profitable discourse; an “aye,” or a “no,” (not always spoken in the right places) was all he could obtain. More frequently, indeed, he got no answer; and then mine host would change his theme, and try whether the mischance of the boar pig had more attractions than the virtues of the brindled cow. But Peverell’s mind was tossing about in a chaos of thought, a world of confused and mis-shapen conjectures, which sometimes grew into half realities, when they were extinguished by fresh doubt, or darkened by seemingly irreconcilable contradictions.

They arrived at the mayor’s, and Wintour took his leave, to attend to the concerns of *The Rose*. Peverell had an interview with his worship, and confining himself to the bare fact of his having discovered the body of a murdered man, without alluding to any other cir-

cumstance, departed again. The mayor was earnest in his invitation to Peverell to stay and breakfast, wishing, of course, to learn something of the preceding night's adventures in the Abbey ; but when he perceived Peverell would not be intreated, he bade him good morning, and assured him he would instantly take the necessary steps for having the traveller's corpse conveyed to the church or town-hall.

The next object of Peverell's anxiety was the situation of Clayton. He called at his house, and found, with much regret, that he still continued in the same state of insensibility. He had been placed in bed, and Peverell went into the chamber. He could hardly persuade himself he was not asleep, so calm and undisturbed was his countenance, so life-like his appearance, and so ruddy and healthful the colour of his cheeks and lips. He approached him, and placed his hand upon his brow. It was cold and clammy. But it was not the marble coldness of death ; only that chilly feel which accompanies suspended animation, by whatever cause produced. He took hold of his hand,

and retained it for some minutes ; it grew warm in his ; and once or twice, when he gently pressed it, he fancied the pressure was as gently returned. He inquired of his wife what was the doctor's opinion. She replied it was favourable ; for having opened a vein in the left arm, it bled freely, which he considered a good sign. Peverell expressed his sincere wish, that the sign might be good ; and Mistress Clayton responded Amen ! with a fervency of manner that convinced Peverell her heart was in the word.

He returned home, and found his orders had been punctually obeyed with respect to the body of poor Madge. It had been removed to her own humble dwelling, he, as in the case of Kit Barnes, having given directions that the decent funeral expences should be at his own charge, with a special command that she should be laid in Marian's grave.

Peverell now sat down to breakfast (rather from the custom of the meal than from any appetite he had for it), when his man Francis presented himself.

"Please you, Sir," said he, "here is the black gentleman on horseback, that would speak with you."

Before Peverell could reply, Fitz-Maurice entered the chamber. Francis withdrew, looking at Fitz-Maurice with an expression of countenance which seemed to say, "if you are not Beelzebub, you are marvellously like him!"

The appearance of Fitz-Maurice was haggard and distressed; his eyes were inflamed, his cheek pallid, his manner full of weariness and languor. Peverell pressed him to refresh himself with what was before him, but he declined.

"I am well pleased to see you," said Peverell, after a pause.

"I judged so," replied Fitz-Maurice, "and therefore have I come."

"I had your letter yesterday," observed Peverell; "but—"

"But," interrupted Fitz-Maurice, "you had not its meaning. I did not intend you should."

"Then, why——"

He was again interrupted by Fitz-Maurice.

"Then why send it, you would ask? This

is my answer. When you shall know why I first sought you—why I sat with you in the Abbey, one night—why I did not sit with you there last night—why I am here now—and why you are perplexed, almost to madness, then shall you also know wherefore I am inscrutable.”

“ And then,” replied Peverell, “ it may boot me, perchance, as little as it now does Kit Barnes, and Wilkins, and my friend Clayton, to know aught about it.”

“ *Was* he your friend ?” exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, eagerly.

“ Whom ?” said Peverell.

“ That Clayton you speak of,” answered Fitz-Maurice.

“ Aye,” replied Peverell ; “ the friend of more years that are gone than remain.”

“ And what of *him* ?” rejoined Fitz-Maurice ; “ tell me—tell me.”

Peverell related the occurrences of the preceding night in the Abbey, bringing down his narrative, so far as it concerned Clayton, to the visit he had just paid at his house.

“ What made him go the first night ? ” inquired Fitz-Maurice.

“ My persuasions,” answered Peverell.

“ What the second ? ”

“ The same cause, as I believe ; or rather, to be just with him,” continued Peverell, “ for that he was my friend, and would not leave me.”

“ The condition fails ! ” muttered Fitz-Maurice to himself, and pressed his hand upon his forehead.

Peverell then recounted all the other circumstances which had occurred—the packet of which Fortescue was the bearer—the resolution not to resume their watchings in the Abbey—the ground of that resolution, and the required motive to renounce it—together with all that related to the discovery of Fortescue’s murdered remains. Fitz-Maurice listened impatiently to the recital ; and when it was concluded, he looked at Peverell attentively.

“ Are *you* one with the many ? ” said he.

“ I am one *of* them,” replied Peverell, “ and find I lack power to move them as I would.”

“What if they all fall off?” observed Fitz-Maurice.

“I would go on,” answered Peverell, “if—”

“If you saw whither you went,” added Fitz-Maurice.

“No!” said Peverell; “if I could but feel, though that feeling were created in me by mute words, that I should proceed.”

“This is a rich ornament,” remarked Fitz-Maurice, carelessly, taking up the gold chain and crystal cross of Fortescue, which lay upon the table.

“Yes,” replied Peverell; “and if he who owned it, were slain by those whose object was plunder, I marvel that it or his purse should have escaped them.”

“You would go on,” continued Fitz-Maurice, musing, and repeating the expressions of Peverell, “if you could but feel, though that feeling were created in you by mute words, that you SHOULD PROCEED?” and he laid a peculiar emphasis upon *proceed*.

“Even so,” replied Peverell.

“You are right!” exclaimed Fitz-Maurice,

grasping his hand, while his countenance brightened into joy ; “ I leave you now ; but you shall see me again this day.”

“ When ? ” inquired Peverell.

“ You shall see me. I am no slave of time, or of events. When you see me, expect strange things ! ”

He arose, and forthwith departed. His dwarf, as usual, was waiting with his steed, which Fitz-Maurice mounted and rode off.

CHAPTER III.

PEVERELL returned to his chamber. "I am, indeed, perplexed almost to madness!" he exclaimed, as he threw himself in a chair, (using the words of Fitz-Maurice) "and see no end to my perplexity. I begin to languish for that repose of the spirit which may be found in even suffering the worst. It is to lie on the rack, thus to be hurried from doubt to doubt, from fear to fear, and from hope to hope, each hour teeming with some fresh wonder to bewilder me. Would I were once satisfied!"

While uttering these words, he had taken up the chain of Fortescue, and was partly

occupied in admiring its rich workmanship, as well as the extreme beauty, and transparent purity of the crystal, out of which the cross, that was pendant to it, had been formed. Passing his fingers over the surface, to feel the exquisite polish it had received, he thought he perceived, on the transverse piece, a slight ruggedness, as if it had been scratched. He examined it more closely, and could plainly distinguish some words engraven on it. He tried to read them, but could not, for though palpable to the touch, and visible to the eye, they were not legible. He drew nearer to the window, that he might have more light. Still he was unable to decipher the inscription, which appeared to be imbedded in the pellucid substance. At length, he held the crystal up to the sun, when, to his utter amazement, he saw, in liquid crimson letters, and floating as it seemed, in the centre of the cross, the following words :—

“ Let no man fault—*but proceed :*
All that has been, was all decreed ;
All that must be, must all succeed :
Be firm of purpose—firm of deed.”

Peverell was confounded. He gasped for breath : a sudden faintness came over him : he doubted, yet almost dreaded, the evidence of his own senses. Could it be, that he had really read these words, or was it a figment—a coinage of his own distempered fancy ? He examined the cross more curiously than he had hitherto done : tried if he could discover any part where it had been joined ; and attempted again to decipher the characters externally ; but they appeared to have no resemblance to those which formed the words he had read. He shook the crystal violently, and then held it up to the sun. The only effect was, that the crimson hue of the letters was a little deepened by the agitation. The words were small, but perfectly distinct, and so divided, that the first two lines appeared upon one section, and the second two, upon the other, of the transverse piece.

Peverell, who was now satisfied that it was no illusion, at once comprehended its design ; as far, at least, as concerned himself, and the rest who had watched with him in the Abbey.

But there was something frightful to his imagination, when he reflected how he had become possessed of this mysterious injunction. He had plucked it from the mangled neck of a murdered man. And who was that man? How murdered? By what hidden influence had his steps been so directed as to make him the discoverer of his melancholy fate? That black, shaggy-haired cur, too, how inexplicable was its appearance and actions!

All these thoughts, and a crowd of others, linked with them by obvious associations, whirled through his brains, as he sat, with the cross in his hand, and every now and then holding it up to the sun, to read, and re-read, the mystic words. While thus absorbed in meditation, he received a message from the mayor, which plunged him into still greater amazement. It was to inform him, that persons had been despatched to the place he had mentioned, but that there was no vestige of any corpse to be seen.

“Impossible!” he exclaimed. “They must

have mistaken the spot; or I gave a blundering description of it."

He resolved to go himself, and he called upon mine host, in his way, to accompany him. They were attended by several of the officers belonging to the corporation.

"You know the place," said Peverell, to Wintour, as they proceeded along, "where I hailed you this morning, and where, when you came, you saw the body of Fortescue?"

"Know it," replied Wintour, "do I know my own right hand? Why every rood of ground, between this and my farm, is as familiar to me as my bed. It is all idle nonsense about the body being gone; the truth on't is, they did not want to be troubled, and would rather have left it as a meal for the crows, than carry it to the town-hall."

They soon arrived at the spot. "Here we are," said mine host, scrambling up the bank, "and here he lies, I'll warrant, e'en as we left him."

"Then he has come back within these two hours," observed the beadle, with a chuckle:

“for that is just the point we reached, and where we looked for the body most diligently.”

Wintour stared, but spoke not. Peverell cleared the hedge in an instant, and sprang into the field on the other side. He was silent, too. Not only there was no corpse to be seen, but the grass looked fresh and unbroken, even where the blood had gathered into a pool, and where the marks were visible of a violent struggle. Peverell could almost have suspected that both himself and Wintour were wrong, had it not been for two circumstances: these were, the foot traces, on each side of the bank, where they had ascended and descended; and the small branch of a tree lying in the ditch, which mine host had broken off in letting himself down.

When Peverell was completely satisfied that the body of Fortescue had disappeared, he merely observed to those who had accompanied him, that he would wait upon the mayor himself, and assure his worship of the fact as they had

already represented it. He and Wintour then returned leisurely to the town.

“Can you account for this?” asked mine host, as he got over a stile.

“No,” replied Peverell, thoughtfully; “I cannot account for it; neither can I for the shape of yonder cloud, or why that tree spreads its branches so fantastically. I only know that these things are so?”

“What do you think?” continued Wintour.

“Think!” said Peverell; “what should I think, but that you and I have a story to tell, at which men may shrug their shoulders and shake their heads, while we must hold our tongues, though our hearts swell ne’er so big.”

“That is most certain,” quoth mine host, “and it is a scurvy trick that Master Fortescue has played us, *ergo*. By my faith—I think I have it!” he continued; “the thieves—nay, they were not thieves, for they took nothing but his life—but the murderers, have conveyed away the body and buried it, for their own safety. And yet, that will not do, upon better consideration, for they could not have made the

grass spring up where it was trodden down, nor very easily have washed out the blood. So I am at fault——”

“Spare your brains, good Master Wintour,” said Peverell; “they will not do you the service you require; but be thou at Lacy’s three hours hence, and thou may’st there hear something which will, perchance, help thee to a clearer understanding of this matter.”

Wintour promised he would, and left Peverell at the door of the mayor’s house.

It was absolutely necessary, now, for Peverell to enter into some explanations with the mayor, sufficient, at any rate, partly to account for the apparent absurdity of the statement he had made. He therefore gave his worship a general, but guarded narrative of the circumstances connected with Fortescue, and concluded, by observing, that this last occurrence was only another link in that chain of mystery which hung about the Abbey.

“A chain of mystery, indeed,” quoth his worship, “and so long a chain, that I can tell you it hath reached from here to London. I

have had an emissary down here, from the ecclesiastical courts to make inquiries, and 'tis likely the Council will take up the business. I have given my opinions upon it, and my advice too ; so they cannot say they are in the 'dark.'

"That is as it should be," replied Peverell ;
"but what do you expect will grow out of this inquiry, and your advice ?"

"I may not be more particular in the matter," said his worship, with an air of infinite solemnity, "till I hear again from the Council. It were as much as mine office is worth, to babble indiscreetly. But you shall find, and so shall they all find, that I have not slept at my post, nor winked at those duties, which fall so heavily on public men, when the safety o' the commonweal is grievously endangered."

Peverell repressed his strong inclination to smile at this sudden display of grave magisterial solicitude, which seemed to have been roused in his worship's bosom by the arrival of the emissary from the ecclesiastical courts, and the anticipated investigation before the Council. He did not then know that the "emissary" was

merely one of the inferior domestics of the Archbishop of Canterbury's household, who knew something of his worship in former days, and called to revive old recollections, as he was casually travelling through St. Albans, upon an errand no way connected with its Abbey ; and that all the rest, about the Council, was simply the fringe of his worship's own invention.

He took his leave, however, and repaired to Lacy's, to have some communication with him upon what had occurred. He was not at home ; but Peverell was ushered into a room where he found his daughter, Helen. He had never seen her before, that he remembered, and yet, at the very first glance, her air and figure created a feeling of instant recollection. He was not long in doubt. A further observation of her person and dress, satisfied him it was she, and no other, who that morning had crossed the field in which lay the body of Fortescue. But she evidently did not recollect him ; and he was determined, therefore, to ascertain if he could possibly be deceived in his opinion. In the

course of a desultory conversation, he suddenly mentioned, as a rumour which was ripe in the town, that the body of a murdered traveller had been found in some fields, between two and three miles on the road to Dunstable. Helen changed colour—betrayed considerable agitation, and without asking, as would have been natural under other circumstances, any questions respecting the murder, she abruptly changed the subject of discourse.

Peverell was convinced. But what could have caused her to be thus early abroad? And how could she have witnessed what she did, and betrayed so little emotion? These were silent interrogatories, which immediately presented themselves to Peverell's mind, and which he was unable to answer.

He did not prolong an interview which had now become mutually embarrassing; but naming the hour at which he would return to have some conversation with Lacy, took his leave.

Helen was greatly relieved by his departure. She wanted the solitude of her own thoughts, for there was matter in them to absorb her

whole soul. A fearful step had been hazarded ; and to retrace it, was so little possible, nay, so little desired by her, that she was only intent upon schooling her heart to encounter and sustain the trial.

She had never, till this moment, felt the loneliness of her condition. Since her mother's death, she had so entirely abandoned herself to the discharge of those duties, which connected her with her father alone, that he had become her friend, companion, lover,—all ; and she wished no second object in her affections or esteem. In every thing that concerned her, he had, till now, been the only being in the world to whom she unbosomed herself ; now he was the only being in the world to whom she could not. It seemed to her, indeed, as if they had exchanged their relative situations ; as if her father were the object of *her* solicitude, and that she had to watch over and protect *him*, instead of being, herself, the delicate flower that should securely blossom beneath his guardian shade. Often when these thoughts prevailed, she would feel all the sacred recollections of her departed mother kindle within her, and inspire her noble nature with

the anxieties of the wife, the parent, and the daughter, blended in the singleness of her filial devotion.

Helen had never sought to fix a friend among those of her own sex, and of her own rank and condition. But in this unexpected crisis, she raised to her confidence, a faithful creature, who had been her foster sister ; one who had been brought up in the family, and who, for the last three years, had been constantly about her person, as her own maid.

Bridget Hall, (or little Bridget, as Lacy used to call her, from her diminutive growth,) might have had manifold failings, though it is no where recorded she had any ; but she was the mistress of two virtues in absolute perfection—unshaken fidelity, and boundless attachment, to Helen. If Helen could have required, or Bridget could have believed there was occasion, that she should throw herself from the house-top to benefit “her dear ladyship,” the belief and the leap would have been linked as closely together as the electric flash, and the bolt that follows it. Bridget had another re-

markable quality likewise, which some might be tempted to call a third virtue, seeing she was a woman ; or rather *the* virtue, by way of distinction. Her tongue was as short as her body : and without having read or heard, of the ancient states of Greece, (which certainly she never had,) there was, on all occasions, a Spartan brevity in her speech, that made many of the more loquacious of her own sex, declare she must have been bewitched when a nursling. Be this as it might, however, her laconic replies and communications were often of so whimsical a character, that it was the delight of her fellow-servants to ask her questions, or set her upon delivering a message. They were sure to have the reward they sought.

She presented herself in the kitchen, one day, her face streaming with blood.

“Why how now, Bridget,” exclaimed the cook, “what has happened?”

“Tumbled,” quoth Bridget.

“What, out o’ window?”

“Down stairs,” said Bridget.

"But you are wounded, where is it?—on the head?"

"Cut my eye," quoth Bridget.

More than this was not extracted from her ; and less could not. On another occasion, when Helen's favourite little pony was stolen out of the paddock, the moment she heard of the loss, she hastened to her mistress' chamber. It was evident, from her manner, that something untoward had happened.

"What is the matter, Bridget," said Helen, "that you look so disconsolate?"

"They have got her!" exclaimed Bridget.

"Got her!" replied Helen; "whom do you mean?"

"Joan," quoth Bridget,

"What, the pony, grey Joan?" replied Helen.

"Yes."

"Who has got her?"

"The thief."

"But how, and when? and where is the thief?" inquired her mistress.

"I don't know—last night—nobody can tell;" answered Bridget.

Lacy, himself, would sometimes contrive to procure the enjoyment of a good humoured smile at the expense of little Bridget; and this he generally did, either by asking some complicated question, or making some inquiry, which could not be answered but by a series of sentences. If he met her by chance, early in the morning, he would say: "Well, Bridget; do you think your mistress is stirring yet? Go and see. What is it o'clock? Where is Roger? There—go."

"No—Yes—Eight—In the buttery—Directly;" quoth Bridget, and disappeared.

At other times he would address her with great apparent seriousness. "Bridget, I am not well to-day—I have got a touch of the rheumatism in my left shoulder—I think I had better not go out—the air is sharp—did you ever have the cholic? Your poor mother died of it, I believe?"

Bridget listened with the utmost gravity, and when her turn came to speak, she would

reply, with a curtsey between each answer, "I'm very sorry, Sir,—it used to be in your right shoulder—you had better not—yes it is—only once—no, of a quinsey."

This simple, honest, and faithful creature, who was endowed with a naturally shrewd mind, and possessed considerable energy of character, was now admitted, from mingled motives of necessity and choice, to the confidence of Helen. She could scarcely, indeed, execute her design, without either so confiding in her, or exposing herself to conjectures which she disdained to incur ; while, independently of these considerations, she shrunk from being entirely alone in the business.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN, on the over-night, Helen had quitted her father, after another fruitless effort to dissuade him from repeating his visit to the Abbey, she finally and firmly resolved to try the efficacy of those means for his safety, which she doubted not would be successful. Before she went to bed, she disclosed her intentions to Bridget, and explained to her how she could assist in their accomplishment. It was enough for Bridget that her mistress needed her services; beyond that need, she considered it no part of her duty to inquire.

Helen, meanwhile, felt that relief, which the

mind always derives, when beset with difficulties, from the consciousness of having made its election of a remedy, however slender may really be the hope of its efficiency. In the more arduous trials of the heart, suspense is bad enough; but what is there to compare to that comfortless sorrow of knowing, or believing, that we could, if we would, end the troubles that persecute us? Helen had groaned under this sorrow, till her resolution was taken; and from that moment she exchanged it for one infinitely more tolerable. Indeed, she almost scorned to call what she now felt a sorrow, for it consisted only of a self-imposed ordeal, for the sake of her father—for the sake of one whom she cherished with such unbounded love.

Helen was buried in these meditations, when she was aroused from them by the opening of the door, and the entrance of Fitz-Maurice, who was preceded by Bridget.

“He asked for your father,” said Bridget, and left the room.

“He is from home, I learn,” added Fitz-

Maurice bowing, and continuing the abrupt communication of Bridget.

“ Yes ;”—stammered out Helen with inexpressible confusion. “ He is from home.”

Fitz-Maurice made no reply : but stood gazing at Helen in silence. She could not lift her eyes from the ground. They had caught one glimpse of his figure and countenance as he entered, and she felt the crimson on her cheek : her heart palpitated : an indescribable emotion oppressed her. When he spoke, the sound of his voice seemed like a mysterious union of tones she had never heard, with those which were familiar. They were soft, yet deep ; startling, yet gentle ; scarcely of this world, yet beautiful and enthralling. They still vibrated on her ear, like one wild chord of a harp, struck by some hand, with witching harmony beyond the cunning of art. A sudden faintness and tremor were stealing over her—her sight filmed—she laboured to breathe. What could it mean?—Was it the shrinking timidity of her sex, or the high-wrought sensibility of her nature which made her thus,

because in the presence of a stranger? No: for Peverell was no less a stranger, and she had none of these feelings then. It was surely some spell that bound her to her chair. She would have given half her existence to reach her own chamber, but had not power to rise.

Fitz-Maurice stood before her, and marked the conflict she endured. At length he spoke: and Helen was lost in delirium.

“Fair one!” He paused. “You tremble!”

He approached nearer. Helen’s agitation increased.

“Oh, God!” he exclaimed, “let not this too be mockery!”

Helen heard his voice—but not his words. It penetrated her very soul. He drew nearer still. She could have wished the earth to yawn, and hide her. He took her hand. Her emotions were almost suffocating. A flood of tears burst forth, while the hand he held, seemed to be the channel of a glowing fire, that rushed fiercely through her veins. She raised her streaming eyes: they met those of Fitz-Maurice, which flashed with

triumph. He leaned forward, and murmured her name.

“Helen Lacy!”

“Again, that voice!” she silently ejaculated—
“that voice of incomprehensible power! which speaks not to my sense, but subdues it!”

Fitz-Maurice quitted her hand, and strode towards a window at the extreme end of the room. He pressed his forehead vehemently, muttering some unintelligible words in a half stifled groan.

Helen ventured to glance at him, while his back was towards her. She felt it was in vain to disguise from herself, that she was under some unknown influence. It was her consolation indeed, and the refuge of her struggling spirit, to think so; or she would have shamed to reflect upon what else had been her unbecoming weakness. In imagination, she still beheld the look that beamed from his dark eyes, as he pronounced her name, and heard the thrilling accents that gave it utterance. Her name too! Helen Lacy!—tongued so familiarly by a stranger! This last thought roused her:

it was a license, fraught with that free and liberal meaning, which maidenly behaviour might not tolerate.

She arose, intending to leave the room. Fitz-Maurice turned, and advanced towards her.

“Your father—” said he.

“Is from home,” added Helen, with a faltering voice,—“but, if it so please you, Sir, I will be the bearer of your message, or,—you can await, here, his return.”

“I could have wished we had met,” replied Fitz-Maurice: “but my will is not the master of my time. Yet it concerns him nearly, what I would impart.”

“Shall I acquaint him with it?” said Helen, standing in the act to retire, and with her eyes fixed on the ground.

Fitz-Maurice passed between her and the door, as if he were himself about to depart. He paused for a moment; and the situation of Helen became most embarrassing. She could not now withdraw, without a nearer approach to Fitz-Maurice, than she had resolution to make; she could not return to her seat, with-

out seeming to invite his further stay ; and she could not remain where she was, without increasing confusion.

“ I *will* crave your attention, a brief time,” said Fitz-Maurice, taking her by the hand, and leading her gently back to her chair. She had now somewhat recovered her wonted self-possession, and she motioned him to sit likewise. He did so ; but at such distance as betokened due respect and courtesy.

“ You *know* me !” he exclaimed. “ I do not mean you can at once pronounce my name. But when *I* do so, your memory will supply the rest ; for, I can well believe it hath passed your father’s lips. I am Fitz-Maurice ! I see I did not err,” he continued, observing the involuntary start which Helen gave. “ It were well—nay, it must be—that we know each other. It is thus only a great purpose can be fulfilled.”

“ You left your pillow early, this morning,” he added, after a pause, and with much emphasis. “ The lark had scarcely hailed the new born day, ere your steps were towards the path which leads to Margery Ashwell’s cottage.”

Helen was confounded. But her pride now took the alarm. She could not brook this seeming espial of her actions. With a haughty air she demanded, —

“ And what if they were so ? ”

“ *My* father,” replied Fitz-Maurice, “ lies in his grave ; but were he living, and peril environed him, what front of danger, though it glared upon me with the fell tiger’s rage, should stay me in my course to save him ? *Your* father lives : and the Heavens approve a daughter’s pious care. It is the virtue which lends lustre to every virtue, as the sun gives alike its brilliancy to the diamond, and its spotless purity to the pale lily.”

This was a theme dear to Helen’s heart ; and she listened, with pleased attention, to the words of Fitz-Maurice ; as they fell from his lips, in those peculiar accents that had already so strangely captivated her. Even while she listened, she strove to discover wherein lay the fascination of his voice ; but she could only compare the effect it produced, to that witchery of sound, which sometimes dwells in a

simple strain of melody, such as untaught village maidens wildly chaunt.

“ You love your father,” said Fitz-Maurice.

The countenance and eyes of Helen replied aye ! in eloquent silence. They were radiant with filial devotion.

“ And you are much troubled for his safety ?” he continued.

Helen sighed ; while deep sorrow sat upon her features.

“ I will not ask you,” added Fitz-Maurice, “ what it is you fear. Enough that you fear, and are unhappy ! I am, myself, the victim of too much misery, not to mourn with those who are in tribulation. And I have felt too severely how tenfold bitter that trouble is which preys upon a lonely spirit, not to proffer consolation to the afflicted.”

The melancholy tone of Fitz-Maurice penetrated the heart of Helen. It betrayed such deep-rooted distress—such a long and hopeless acquaintance with many griefs, that she could have wept, if her tears might have fallen un-

seen. A gentle sigh only breathed through her silent lips.

“ You pity me,” said Fitz-Maurice. “ Nay, blush not, for that I have read your thoughts, nor for them. But, if compassion kindle in your bosom, because you hear me say I am steeped in veriest wretchedness, how would your heart bleed to learn the story of my sufferings ? Ah ! gentle lady ! I could unfold a history, so sad, so full of woe ; a life of such sharp adversity ; of such prolonged and ceaseless agony ; of such fierce trial, that tears and sighs should follow each word, as the blood gushes where the knife is driven. And I could end my melancholy tale with a prayer, even to thee, fair one, so strange, yet so earnest withal, that horror and amazement should be at war within you, as wonder is now. But these things may not yet be voiced ; nor came I here to dwell upon them. Let the tide of time roll on. When it bears upon its surface the rare creature who shall unchain me from my mysterious destiny, then shall my invocation be heard.”

Fitz-Maurice ceased ; and Helen sat mute.

She did not comprehend, and she could not therefore address herself to his last words ; nor, if she had comprehended them, could she the more have spoken.

The pause that ensued was becoming irksome to her, and she ventured to disturb it.

“ You talked of my father,” said she.

“ Yes,” replied Fitz-Maurice ; “ and now heed me well. Inquire not how I know—nor what I know—but be satisfied with your own knowledge. You purpose, this night, to be resolved of things that are to come ; and if Alascon be not moody and sullen, your utmost questionings will be answered.”

“ Alascon !” exclaimed Helen.

“ Aye,” said Fitz-Maurice ; “ and a more potent spirit, or one that sees the future with more unerring ken, dwells not in the earth’s centre. But he is wayward, and will not always be commanded. You should be armed with power to compel his obedience.”

“ How ?” inquired Helen, with a trembling voice.

“ Why, thus,”—answered Fitz-Maurice.

“Peverell comes here anon—and others with him. You must be present; and when he stands beside you, musing, demand of him a golden signet. Say nor more nor less, than this—*the golden signet—it is mine!* He will render it to thee, which when thou hast, place it on thy wedding finger, nor remove it till the sun hath thrice and thrice descended in the west. When thou art confronted with Alascon, should he be moody, surly, or fain to palter with thee, full in his eyes hold thou thy encircled finger, and cry—*if thou refuse to answer to earth-born powers, I command thee, OBEY THE SIGNET!* At this behest, he is yours, for whatsoe’er thou wilt; so it be not beyond him. But, neglect not in the smallest part, what I have enjoined; for in the smallest part, as in the whole, lies the virtue of that, through which your troubled spirit seeks repose.”

Helen listened to these injunctions with mute attention. She did not feel quite assured she should need them; her resolution might fail her at the last; but it was soothing to her anxious mind to know that she could be thus fore-armed.

“ I exact no pledge,” continued Fitz-Maurice. “ What you do, must be done freely—I only possess you of the means to effect your will, thus formed, and thus exerted. For myself, lady, if one so unworthy, and a stranger, might prefer a suit, I would say—go on ! More than a father’s life—more than a daughter’s sacrifice—more weal or woe than your imagination can conceive—hang upon your resolves. We shall meet again ! Certainly, again ! and again ! Perhaps, many a time and oft, when all that is now dark, shall appear in noon-day brightness ; and when he who calls himself, Fitz-Maurice, shall worship a name which then will be enshrined in his very heart.”

The fervent and impassioned manner, with which he uttered these words, alarmed Helen. It was so unlike the calm, subdued tone of his previous conversation, and was accompanied by such evident agitation of his feelings. He perceived her emotion.

“ Forgive,” said he, in his wonted accents, “ a warmth, and energy, into which I was for a moment betrayed, by the maddening recol-

lections of the past, by the stinging consciousness of the present, and, last, not least, by the almost frantic glimpses of the future. Your pardon and your pity ! So imploring, I bid you farewell."

He departed. Helen heard his descending steps ; and the sound of horses' feet immediately after, told her he was gone. She felt inexpressibly relieved. It was as if she were once more the mistress of herself, and could look, and breathe, and move, without restraint. She had leisure too, to collect her scattered thoughts, which she had vainly striven to do, while in the whirlwind of those feelings excited by the presence and discourse of Fitz-Maurice.

And whence that presence ? Did he expect to see her father ? Or did he choose his time, with the certain knowledge he should see her only ? His whole manner attested the latter. He had come, to foster and support the secret resolution of her shrinking heart. But, how did he know any such resolution was struggling there ? Those mysterious and emphatic words too : *it were well, nay it must be, that*

we know each other. It is thus only a great purpose can be fulfilled! And again; *more than a father's life, more weal or woe than your imagination can conceive, hang upon your resolves.* Yet, why recal these words alone? Was not every one he uttered a teeming mystery? Were not his every look and action fraught with strange meanings? Why, else, their spell-like influence? Or why those unbidden tears, those chilling tremors, and that delirium of the senses, when he spoke, as if his voice were some dulcet strain of magic harmony?

These reflections crowded on the brain of Helen so fast, that she grew bewildered. She sat for nearly an hour in a state bordering upon stupor. At length they began to subside; when, disentangling from the confused mass, two or three distinct images, she brought them under the control of her reason, and meditated again upon that daring project which occupied her thoughts when Fitz-Maurice entered so unexpectedly.

CHAPTER V.

IT was indeed true, as Fitz-Maurice had said; "the lark had scarcely hailed the new-born day, ere Helen's steps were towards the path that led to Margery Ashwell's cottage."

This Margery Ashwell lived in a most lonely spot, at the end of a long and narrow lane, deeply overshadowed by lofty trees, in the midst of which stood her little hut. She had out-numbered three score years and ten, and was nearly bent double with age. No human habitation stood within a mile of hers; and no human being, except herself, dwelt within her own habitation. She was known to have deal-

ings with the invisible world of spirits, for many were the proofs she had given of her powerful art ; but she was accused of much more malignant mischief than she ever committed.

If any neighbouring farmer, or his wife, sickened, it was because the hag Margery had stuck a heart of wax full of magic needles ; or had made an exact image of the sick person, in wax, and roasted it before a slow fire ; the marrow of the sufferer melting away, drop by drop, as the image itself dissolved. If any thing went wrong in the dairy, the witch Ashwell had hurt their churnings. No accident could happen to their cattle, whether a horse fell lame, or a sheep were found dead in a ditch, or a milch cow lost her milk, or swine perished, but she had bewitched them. They did not scruple, indeed, to go still further, and affirm that she raised storms which hurled down lofty oaks, though rooted a century in the earth ; that she would blast vineyards, orchards, and meadows in a single night ; and convey away corn or hay, from the barns of

such as had offended her, to those of others by whom she had not been denied milk, flour, or a syllabub, now and then. There were some, too, ready to swear they had seen her sail in a sieve; others, in an egg shell; while they had certainly hunted her sometimes in the shape of a rat, and sometimes in that of a black dog, or brinded cat; but always without a tail.

Helen had frequently heard of Margery Ashwell, from her infancy upwards; for the accounts of her exploits, true, or false, filled the mouths of the peasantry, and made her, alternately, the jeer and terror of the surrounding country. It corresponded well, therefore, with Helen's wild imagination, and feverish fears for her father, to seek, by means similar to those which she believed were now working his peril, the power to save him. She did not, indeed, doubt her own ability, by the aid of her books, to perform a charm which should be strong enough to obtain her object; but she doubted her fortitude to go through with it, and she dreaded what might be the horrid penalties of failure. Hence, she resolved to consult

Margery Ashwell ; and that very morning, taking little Bridget with her, (for she was ignorant of the road, and besides, wished not to go alone, by unfrequented fields and paths), she had, at day-break, proceeded thither. But how Fitz-Maurice knew of her visit, and of what had passed between her and Margery, (or, at least, of part of it,) she could explain only by what she had heard her father say, when speaking of him, that he could scarcely tell whether to call him man or wizard, or a compound of both.

When Helen arrived at the cottage of Margery, she found the old crone in bed, gathered round like a hoop. A large black cat, with sleek fur, and bright blue eyes, lay watching upon her pillow, and there were three baboons, one of them grey with age, and quite blind, littered about the room. Suspended from the centre of the roof was a blue phial, containing a huge toad, which was alive, though then apparently in a torpid state. Some human bones, a skull, and what seemed to be the body of a new born infant, with the dried skin of a water-

snake coiled tightly round its neck, and two glow worms shining in the sockets instead of eyes, stood on a table in a dark corner near the fire-place. In the opposite corner was a brood of enormous rats, sweltering in blood, which was contained in a brazen cauldron.

Helen looked fearfully at these hideous objects ; and Bridget, who had a very orthodox terror of witches, whispered in her ear, " Plenty of fright, your ladyship."

" Enter," said Margery, when Helen tapped at the door ; " enter ! I can sleep without bars or bolts. I thought I should see a stranger before I saw the sun to-day, for my old hip-bone has never ceased to ache since the first cock-crow. Let me see," she continued, wiping away the rheum from her eyes, " who is it seeks me ? Aye, I warrant I am right enough —Madam Lacy, or a fat pig ; but, an' it be not the latter, I'll be sworn it is Madam Helen Lacy."

" The same," said Helen.

" I knew it was," quoth Margery. " And your errand ? My taper burned red last night.

A man of war is dead (says Hilco) when pale lights are red. But what is thine errand, thou sorrowful maiden ?”

The heart of poor Helen almost died within her, as the hag uttered the words,

“ A man of war’s dead,
When pale lights are red.”

It was as if she had heard her father’s funeral knell. Bridget, also, noted the dismal prophecy which they seemed to contain ; but observing the effect they had produced upon her mistress, she again gave vent to one of her laconic whispers—“ Laugh, my lady !”

“ How !” exclaimed Margery, in an angry voice, “ you are not alone !—you disturb me !” And she drew, nearly over her head, the curiously wrought coverlet under which she lay. It seemed to be made of the spotted hide of some strange animal, and the four corners were dyed with hieroglyphic characters, in colours of bright yellow, purple, and azure.

“ I meant not to offend,” said Helen, timidly, (while she signified, by a look to Bridget,

that she should wait on the outside)—“but it was far to come—and, besides, I knew not the path to your dwelling.”

“Well, well,” quoth the beldam, in somewhat gentler phrase, “it is a fault soon mended, I perceive. And now, once more, the cause of this your early visit here? But stay—you are weary, and would sit.—What! ho! Hopdance! Where are you? Hopdance!—my son—come to me.”

Helen looked round to see whom Margery was calling; when she beheld, with astonishment, one of the baboons (the largest of the three) spring upon the bed; and afterwards, at a signal which it understood, leap towards its mistress, and lie down close by her face. She fondled the chattering, grinning animal for a moment; then patted it on the head; and repeating a few words, unintelligible to Helen, it bounded to the floor, whirled three times round as if for joy, and twisted its lithe body into the form of a low stool, at her feet.

“There, rest thee,” said Margery, “and confess thou never hadst a more delicate seat.”

Helen hesitated. She could not believe it was intended she should make that use of the creature, and she had no fancy, moreover, for such a ticklish kind of chair.

"Sit, sit," continued Margery, "or Hop-dance will grow sullen and mischievous. It is not every one to whom he will thus offer himself, even at my bidding; but he is gentle and gracious this morning."

Helen, with much difficulty overcame her repugnance; and with some apprehension of toppling to the ground, took her seat as she was commanded. It was certainly not what she expected to find it; for, could she have forgotten it was a live stool, she might have called it a comfortable one. As soon as she felt a little at her ease, she unfolded to Margery Ashwell the reasons of her visit.

"And you would learn, through me," said Margery, when Helen concluded, "if my art can do it, two things—what dangers threaten your father's life,—and what charm or spell can save him from them?"

"Even so," replied Helen.

"Be silent as the grave," added she, "while I commune with myself. Speak not till I speak."

Helen scarcely breathed, as she gazed at the old hag, who closed her eyes, but seemed by the motion of her lips, to be muttering certain words. She lay thus for nearly ten minutes. Once or twice her face was slightly convulsed. Helen fancied, too, (though she quickly strove to convince herself it was only fancy,) that at these moments there was a trembling of the walls and floor. At length, the withered bel-dam unclosed her eyes, and turning them upon Helen with a wild and frightful expression—

"You MAY be satisfied," said she.

"When, and how?" exclaimed Helen, eagerly.

"Soft, awhile," replied Margery; "there be conditions."

"Name them!" said Helen, with the same impetuosity of manner.

"Not now," answered Margery. "Take till midnight to know thyself."

"Midnight!" exclaimed Helen.

"Aye; it must be midnight, deep, dark mid-

night. And if at that drear hour, when the screech owl is heard, and yawning graves send forth their unblest dead—thou canst return—do so.”

“Alone?” said Helen.

“Alone, *when* you pass my threshold,” replied Margery, “nor (let who may attend thy steps,) must man, woman, or child, be within ear-shot, *after*.”

“At midnight!” repeated Helen, shuddering.

“Even with the hour—even with the very hour,” said Margery.

“And when I come?” continued Helen—

“I will not be questioned now,” interrupted the hag—“go as ye came,—or come again.”

“You shall see me at midnight,” said Helen, after a pause.

“What sayest thou, Flibbert?” exclaimed Margery, casting her eyes towards the roof. Helen’s followed in the same direction. She perceived the toad, which was suspended exactly over her head, crawling up the side of the phial, and its body swollen and transparent, so that the green and scarlet spots, with which

it was covered, were distinctly visible. She did not observe that the phial was closed at the top, and terrified lest the loathsome reptile should drop upon her, she started from her seat ; when the baboon, in an instant, untwisted itself, and again whirling round three times, squatted on its haunches in the corner where Helen had first noticed it, upon entering the cottage.

“ ’Tis a spiteful urchin,” said Margery, perceiving Helen’s alarm, “ but it cannot come out. I have penned it there ever since it bit my dug when sleeping, and festered it with poison. I know what disturbs it now,” she continued, darting an angry glance at it, from her small, sharp, grey eyes. “ Down, malice ! down hell-seed !—sleep, spit-fire ! What ! must I make thee ?”

The filthy creature seemed to know it was commanded, for Helen could see its sides heave and pant, as it were with rage, while drops of black froth spirted from its jaws, as it slowly descended again to the bottom of the phial.

Helen now prepared to leave, after repeating her assurance of returning at midnight.

“ Wear your mouth in your heart till then, as the wise ones of the earth ever do, and that which thou seekest thou shalt find ;” said Margery. “ Go. But let thy follower, here, be thy forerunner home. Several ways directt passengers into the town : take thou one, she another. And whatseo’er thou seest, have no tongue, no fear. Fountains run by many winding and mazy currents, into one main river ; rivers by sundry channels into one main ocean ; perplex not thyself, therefore, to know how events shall work to one main end. Begone ! for I must be busy.”

Helen left the cottage, and found Bridget seated on the stump of a tree, weeping bitterly. She never expected to see her mistress again ; for she was certain she had beheld her shadow flit past her, followed by four witches with long beards, bearing a white coffin in their hands. She did not tell Helen of this vision, lest it should terrify her ; but she believed it most devoutly, notwithstanding the ocular proof before her, that at any rate Helen was not yet dead.

In strict obedience to the injunctions of Margery, Helen now sent Bridget home by herself ; and without certainly knowing whither it would lead her, but keeping the lofty towers of the Abbey in view, as a sort of guide, she pursued a separate path. She was thus hastening along, full of anxious thoughts, and agitated by conflicting feelings, when she crossed the field in which lay the body of Fortescue, where Peverell saw her. . She did not once look at Peverell, and hence her non-recognition of him afterwards. The mangled remains of Fortescue she could not avoid seeing ; but it was a severe trial of her faith, at that moment, to have neither “ tongue nor fear ;” not less on account of the sudden shock, caused by such a revolting spectacle, than from another circumstance which utterly amazed her.

CHAPTER VI.

HELEN had studiously avoided her father that day, and pleaded, through Bridget, a slight indisposition, as a reason for keeping her chamber. She might, in truth, have urged a stronger plea; for what with her previous anxiety, a sleepless night (or such sleep only as irritated instead of nourishing the body), and the strong excitement produced by the occurrences of the morning, her naturally delicate frame was suffering under serious debility. The unexpected and mysterious interview with Fitz-Maurice had greatly increased her sufferings, both mental and bodily; and she hardly dreaded

her midnight appointment with Margery Ashwell, more than she did her task of demanding the golden signet from Peverell, in the presence of her father and the rest. But she was determined to perform it. "What daughter could do less for such a father," she exclaimed to herself, "and be worthy of him?"

Lacy returned while Helen was absorbed in these reflections. She rose to meet him, with as much serenity of countenance and hilarity of manner as she could command; but her languid eyes, flushed cheeks, and anxious brow, sufficiently proclaimed that her indisposition of the morning had not abated. Lacy tenderly expressed his fears that her sickness was greater than she would allow, and urged her to see the doctor. Helen laughed at the idea, assured her father that it was a mere momentary ailment, and then told him of Peverell's visit.

"I met him," said Lacy, "and expect him, with my little regiment, as I call them, in something less than half an hour. He informs me he has some fresh wonder to tell, which is to

convince us all that we must visit the Abbey again."

"Said I not it would be so?" replied Helen.

"You did," answered Lacy; "but it is yet to know what this wonder is, and whether we shall consider it as Peverell does."

"Methinks I should like to hear what it is myself," observed Helen.

"And thou mayest, if thou wilt," replied her father. "Abide here till they come; and I will propose that you be admitted of our council. Who knows but thy woman's wit may shame ~~our's~~ in this business."

Helen gladly accepted the offer; for so, only, could she demand the golden signet.

"There has been another seeking you," she said, and her voice faltered a little.

"Who?" inquired Lacy.

"Fitz-Maurice."

"Fitz-Maurice!" he exclaimed; "that does indeed surprise me."

"He said, he could have wished you had met," continued Helen, "for that it concerned you nearly, what he would impart. I pressed

to be the bearer of his message ; but it seemed it could not be so conveyed."

"I wish we had met," replied Lacy ; "I should have liked well, a quiet interchange of words with him, for an hour or so. Does he return ?"

"That, he did not say," answered Helen, with increased confusion ; for she remembered his words, "*we shall certainly meet again and again*—and it seemed almost like paltering with truth, to make the distinction she had. Still she felt it was impossible, at that moment, to disclose what had passed ; and lest, therefore, her father should become more particular in his questions, she was about to change the matter of discourse, when the door opened, and De Clare entered. After mutual salutations had been exchanged between him and Helen, Lacy mentioned his intention of proposing that she should be admitted of their council.

"It would require the silver tongue of our friend Mortimer," observed De Clare, "to say all the gracious things proper on such an occa-

sion. I am ill at these honied phrases ; but," he continued, bowing to Helen, "there is nothing he may protest by his manhood, or his veracity, which shall exceed what I feel, at so honoured an addition."

"This Mortimer," said Helen, gracefully acknowledging the compliment of De Clare, "is a man of picked speech, and refined observances, I presume?"

"The very perfection of a lady's gallant," replied De Clare; "your only true knight—for he never talks from the head."

"Then how should he talk to the heart?" answered Helen.

"How he should," rejoined De Clare, "surpasses my judgment to discover; why he does, it is for you, who have hearts thus assailable, to explain."

"I shrewdly suspect," said Helen, "that these mere talkers, as you describe them, succeed better with their own hearts than with ours; and that the triumphs they boast, are like those we win when we reason with

ourselves, a victory where there is no spoil, because there is no enemy."

"Oh, that Nicholas Mortimer could hear you!" exclaimed De Clare. "He would overwhelm you with a flood of words, and, at the most, a single drop of reason; or, incontinently go hang himself in his silken garters."

"Neither the one nor the other," replied Helen, playfully. "For his words, they would rebound—because, as I take it, they are of a cork-like quality—light and floating: and for his silken garters, he would forget to hang himself while he was admiring how well their colour became him."

"You are beaten out of the field," said Lacy, laughing, "so surrender yourself."

De Clare smiled. "I think I am so far disabled," said he, "that if I do not surrender, I must at least sound a retreat."

They were now joined by Peverell, mine host, Walwyn, and Vehan; and in a few moments after, Hoskyns, Mortimer, Wilfrid Overbury, and Owen Reys arrived. Helen thought she had never seen so truculent and ferocious

an aspect as that of Overbury, and she half shuddered at his uncouth and brutish salutation of her. The flutter and grimace of Mortimer scarcely attracted her notice. Nor did she much observe any of the rest, except Peverell; towards whom she directed many a searching look, as if she would at once penetrate his mystery, or read what was passing in his mind. Peverell, too, contemplated Helen with a degree of interest which he would not have experienced, but for the certainty he felt that he had seen her in the morning, under the peculiar circumstances already mentioned.

Almost the first topic of conversation among them was the situation of Clayton. Peverell had made repeated inquiries during the day, but each time the same answer was given, that no alteration had taken place. "It was a grievous state to be in," he observed; "though, as he learned, he had remained much longer in a similar one, on a former occasion."

"Who has seen or heard of Fitz-Maurice to-day?" inquired Hoskyns.

"I have seen him," answered Peverell.

“ And I have heard of him,” replied Lacy.
“ My daughter was more fortunate ; she saw him.”

“ Where?” exclaimed Peverell, eagerly.

“ In this very chamber, I believe,” said Lacy. “ Was it not so, Helen ?”

“ Yes,” she replied.

“ When ?” continued Peverell, addressing himself to Helen.

“ Something more than two hours since ; or thereabouts.”

Peverell drew near to Helen ; and inquired with much earnestness, what had been the object of his visit ; whether he had mentioned his (Peverell’s) name ; and if he had intimated any intention of returning. “ For,” said he, “ when he left me this morning, after an interview of only a few minutes, it was with an assurance I should see him again to-day.”

Helen evaded the first question of Peverell, by simply stating that he had called to speak with her father ; and answered the other two, in the negative.

“ He will not fail me,” observed Peverell,

"I feel satisfied of that; but 'tis strange, what you have reported."

The rest were occupied, at this moment, in discussing the probabilities of Clayton's ultimate recovery. Peverell stood by Helen's chair, musing upon what she had just communicated. No eye was directed towards her, no ear disengaged from the general conversation. It was a favourable moment, such a one as might not occur again, (such a one, indeed, as she had not expected,) for obeying the injunction of Fitz-Maurice. She resolved to seize it. She laid her hand, gently, on the arm of Peverell, to be certain of fixing his attention, and exclaimed, at the same instant, in a firm, but subdued tone of voice, "The golden signet—it is mine!"

Peverell started. A look from Helen, while she placed her finger on her lips, told him she would have him silent. He drew the signet from his pocket; gave it her, unseen of any one, as he passed her; and walking up to the others, fell in, at once, with their conversation about Clayton, by saying, in reply to an ob-

servation from Walwyn, "that he believed the doctor still entertained some hope of his being restored."

Helen felt grateful for the quick delicacy with which he had both understood and fulfilled her wish; and placing the signet on her left hand, as Fitz-Maurice had directed, she was surprised to find, that though somewhat too large, it clipped her finger, as if with the elastic pressure of a spring.

"Well," said Mortimer, addressing Pevenell, "let us hope that the doctor will prove right. But now, what have you to say, touching this same Abbey, and our further visits to it?" Then, turning towards Helen, and approaching her with a mincing step, "What think *you*, Madam?" he exclaimed. "Are we not adventurous spirits to hold such revels with the prince of darkness?"

"If," replied Helen, gravely, "you believe it is with the prince of darkness you hold your revels, you are profane, not adventurous spirits."

"Are you answered, Sir?" said De Clare.

"Yes," replied Mortimer, gaily, "and rebuked too. But mere mortals must expect as much, when they discourse with angels."

Helen smiled; not altogether scornfully, though it would have been difficult to say what smile it was, and exclude scorn from the definition. She made no reply; and Mortimer remained silent. De Clare's eyes sparkled with malicious joy.

"Come," said Walwyn, "let us hear what it is Peverell has to impart. It may be of such relevancy and weight, as to induce us to resume our watchings this night in the Abbey."

"I know not how that may be," replied Peverell, "but I am sure it will amaze you."

He then related his stroll into the fields that morning; the incident of the black shaggy-haired cur; the finding of the body of a murdered man, and the discovery, by mine host, of its being the body of Fortescue. But before he mentioned any thing of the cross, or the purse, he stated the extraordinary event which subsequently occurred, of the total disappearance of the corpse, appealing to Win-

tour for a corroboration of the fact. Mine host confirmed it, with a most perplexing gravity of face.

Helen listened to Peverell's narrative with breathless attention ; especially that portion of it which related to the murder of Fortescue. She knew it must have been Peverell whom she passed, and she wondered whether he had recognized her. She had heard enough. Indeed, she was not aware there was any thing more to tell ; for it never once entered her thoughts, that the golden signet which she had been instructed by Fitz-Maurice to demand of Peverell, had any connexion with Fortescue ; still less that it had belonged to him. Anxious to gain the freedom of solitude, she arose, and spite of some faint entreaties from Mortimer, De Clare, and Peverell, retired to her own chamber.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Helen was gone, De Clare, addressing Peverell, said, "And is this all?"

"No," replied Peverell, gravely, and a little nettled by the blunt question of De Clare, "this is *not* all: but if it were, it is more than you, or any of us, can explain."

He then related his taking the gold chain and crystal cross, from the body of Fortescue.

"Well," observed De Clare, "this is an important addition, certainly. Some love-token, I suppose, of a now disconsolate mistress, who will hear of his fate on Monday, weep all Tuesday, and dress for a new lover on Wednesday."

"Why it seems some such bauble, I confess," answered Peverell, determined to lay a snare for the stubborn and almost offensive scepticism of De Clare. "Here it is," he added, drawing it forth; "look at it, and make what you can of it."

De Clare took it in his hand, and after examining it a little, passed it to Lacy, observing, "It is a rich toy, I grant; and I should think worth the finding."

Lacy started, as he received it from De Clare. He looked at it eagerly; viewed it on all sides; examined the chain; then the cross; and turning to Peverell, said, "Did you take this from the neck of Fortescue?"

"With mine own hands," replied Peverell. "Why do you ask?"

Lacy re-examined it with the most minute attention, particularly one corner, at the back of the cross; then, handing it to Walwyn, he repeated his question, "You took it from the neck of Fortescue?"

"Let mine host vouch for me," said Peverell, "if mine own eye be not sufficient."

"It is not your word I doubt," replied Lacy; "but——"

"But what?" interrupted Peverell.

"I may tell you hereafter," rejoined Lacy.

The chain and cross were passed, from one to the other, till it returned again to Peverell. They all agreed it was a splendid ornament; but beyond that, they saw nothing to note.

"And now," said De Clare, "I suppose we have heard all, and seen all?"

"You may have heard all," replied Peverell, "but you certainly have not seen all. Take this cross again; look at it well; and tell me what you discover."

De Clare did so. "I discover nothing," said he, "but what I did at first—a costly jewel."

"Hold it to that taper," replied Peverell; "hold it close; and then tell me what there is upon the transverse piece."

De Clare obeyed. "This is a trick!" he exclaimed.

"On my soul, no!" said Peverell, with great energy.

De Clare again held the cross to the taper, and, after a pause, said, "Listen, gentlemen: here is matter worth our special notice." He then repeated the lines:—

"Let no man fault, but proceed:
All that has been was all decreed:
All that must be, must all succeed:
Be firm of purpose—firm of deed."

"Give it me!" exclaimed Lacy. He read the same words; and was not content with a second, but had a third, perusal of them. All the rest satisfied their impatient curiosity; and Peverell now related the way in which he had first discovered this extraordinary floating scroll.

"I own myself a convert," said De Clare, after a pause, "to one thing—that there is an unfathomable mystery about this thing: but I am firm to my opinion of last night, that, mystery or no mystery, we are at child's play, till we know further."

"Own something more," exclaimed Overbury; "that you are afraid to go on; and

then add, if you like, that you are firm in your opinion. The child's play lies in your fears."

De Clare was silent. He merely turned upon Overbury a glance of sovereign contempt. But Owen Rees at once took up the gauntlet, which Overbury had thrown down.

"You are right," said the Welchman, "it is childish to have fears and frights, mark you : but you are not right, mark you, when, like a bully, you tell a gentleman he is a coward."

"A bully !" roared out Overbury.

"Yes," replied Owen, not at all moved ; "a bully, Mister Overbury."

"You shall answer for it !" said Overbury.

"I had better answer for it now," rejoined Owen ; "you may forget before to-morrow?"

"You shall answer for it !" repeated Overbury, blowing like a stranded whale.

"I'll tell you how it is," observed Owen, hot in blood, but cool in speech ; "I shall be ready to answer long before you are ready to ask."

"Are you crazed?" exclaimed De Clare, holding back Owen Rees, who was advancing to beard Overbury in a way that must have led

to a personal contest ; “ are you crazed ? Do you not perceive that this is my quarrel, if it were worth my taking up ; and what have you to do with it ? ”

“ If I be reviled,” replied Owen, still harping upon the original offence of the mountain goat, “ shall I stand still, like a goose or a fool, with my finger in my mouth ? Shall I be such an idiot and dizzard, to suffer every man to speak upon me what he lists, to rail what he lists, to vomit forth all his venom at pleasure ? ”

“ Granted,” said De Clare ; “ but he that *cannot* amend another man’s fault, or cannot amend it without his own fault, better it were that one should transgress than two. I concede to you, there *is* a time, when it is meet to answer a fool according to his foolishness, lest he should seem in his own conceit to be wise ; but it is not profitable now to do so.”

Owen was in some degree pacified by this exhortation of De Clare ; but Overbury took it in high dudgeon, and fancying that De Clare stood in awe of him, whatever the Welchman

might do, he determined to goad him still farther.

“ I have never known your talkers,” said he, “ worth the air they spoil with their glib words. Why should the whole flock be accounted tainted, because we have one rotten sheep among us?”

“ Is it your cue to brawl?” exclaimed De Clare, scornfully. “ If it be, fall to it, and I’ll roar as loud as you ! But, if you seek to move me, or think that I esteem so poorly of myself to be stirred to wrath by any word of thine, know me better, and spare yourself the trial. When the soaring eagle stoops, in his royal flight, to strike the sparrow, or, what may better suit itself to your apprehension, when the thunderbolts of the salt sea, arm themselves in terror, to chase a scudding pirate, then expect that I will find a motive to quarrel with what you can utter.”

“ Pirate !” bellowed forth Overbury.

“ Aye—pirate,” reiterated De Clare,—“ the shark of the ocean—the bully of the land. Do you know such a character ?”

Overbury scowled at De Clare, and muttered, in a half growl, "You shall writhe for this."

De Clare turned upon his heel, and addressed himself to Walwyn.

"What is your opinion?" said he. "Do you see enough to alter the resolution we all embraced last night?"

"Here is Fitz-Maurice!" exclaimed Peverell, suddenly. "I left instructions where I was to be found, and I hear the clattering of horses' feet on the outside. It is he, I'll be sworn."

Peverell was right. He had scarcely ceased speaking, when Fitz-Maurice entered.

"I sought you at your house," said he to Peverell, "and learning how you had disposed of yourself, hastened hither. It is not my first visit here to-day," he continued, addressing Lacy.

"I heard of your former one," replied Lacy, "and regretted I was not present to receive you."

"It may prove all the better that you were not," answered Fitz-Maurice.

A silence of some minutes ensued. Fitz-

Maurice maintained his usual stately reserve, or, rather, his habitually abstracted and contemplative mood. No one liked to accost him ; for in spite of themselves they felt a sort of awe in his presence, which they could not shake off.

This feeling was inspired by many causes. The figure of Fitz-Maurice was gigantic : his countenance had a blended expression of sternness and haughty pride : his eye was bold, piercing, and resolute : and his demeanour, eminently dignified. Even his dress—composed entirely of costly sables,—his towering plume of black ostrich feathers,—and his ample cloak, of the same colour, which he always wore in graceful folds round him—tended to heighten the general impression, which was raised to its utmost, by the mystery that invested him. He seemed wholly unconscious of this effect : or, to describe his manner more correctly, he considered it so natural a consequence of his character and qualities, that, like a monarch, who never shows himself but to stand in the general gaze, and be lackied by wonder and applause, he received this dumb homage with the most

serene indifference. It neither disturbed his thoughts, nor excited them ; and he would remain, as he now did, amidst a silent group, whose silence he knew was the result entirely of his presence, without interrupting, for a moment, the current of his own austere and gloomy meditations. Peverell, from all that had already passed between him and Fitz-Maurice, felt perhaps less of this ambiguous influence than the rest ; though even he, could not boast of being remarkably at his ease with him. He resolved, however, to address him.

“ I informed you, this morning,” said he, “ of all that had occurred since the night when you watched with us in the abbey ; but after you left me, one thing took place which we cannot in any manner explain.”

Peverell then mentioned what he had discovered in the crystal cross belonging to Fortescue, placing it at the same time in the hands of Fitz-Maurice, that he might satisfy himself as to the liquid miracle. He looked at it, and read the words without any apparent emotion of surprise.

" You watched last night ?" said he.

" We did," replied Peverell.

" And why did you so ?" continued Fitz-Maurice.

" Because," answered De Clare, " there seemed to be a reason for it."

" What was that reason ?" asked Fitz-Maurice.

" The words inscribed upon the parchment brought by Fortescue—and your own letter to Peverell, dark and incomprehensible as it was," answered De Clare.

" But the first was a juggle," added Overbury, " and the second a —"

Fitz-Maurice fixed his eyes upon Overbury, without speaking. Overbury tried to bear their terrific expression, but he grew pale, and left his reply unfinished.

" Now, what was there half so positive, half so intelligible," continued Fitz-Maurice, " in either the parchment or the letter, as in this ?" holding up the cross.

" But you taught us to expect signs," said

Pevérell ; “ and the recollection of *your* words gave authority to those of the parchment.”

“ And were not my words fulfilled ?” asked Fitz-Maurice. “ I bade you watch for the signs that should shew themselves: you did so; and the signs came. Your looks express incredulity. What was the packet, conveyed by Fortescue, but those very signs ? Nay, if you are critical, and stand upon the literal interpretation of the words, even that will sustain me. When the chimes went nine, you were already in the abbey; and your being there, was the full accomplishment of that which was to send you there. But was this ALL ? I tell you, no ! You had your signs within the walls, as well as without; and you will confess them, ere the moon that now shines, appears again in the heavens.”

“ It is not more mysteries,” said Walwyn, “ or more enigmas, that we require: but something that may satisfy us we are called upon to solve those we have.”

“ What prompted you first to engage in this business ?” replied Fitz-Maurice. “ Is there

one among you who can say? Is there one among you, so reckless of truth, as to avouch that it was an idle fancy of his brain, or a poor conceit to pamper a baby curiosity? Why, then, do you ask a stronger motive to continue than to begin? You came to the enterprise with no better soliciting than your own free choice: and you would now abjure it for no worthier cause than—that you will! Are ye men, and faint so soon? Shew us, you cry, in the dull spirit of common natures, what it is we are to perform—mark out our path—set down our task—let us be drudges of the hour, like the base hind who drives his team a-field—and we will execute our homely service. But look into yourselves, and judge for yourselves, whether ye be not fitted for nobler ends? It is the prerogative of minds, touched with the quality of lofty daring, to act from their own suggestions, and not to wait for impulses from without. It is this prerogative which lifts one man above another, in the degree of its presence, as the divinity of reason lifts the species above the brute creation.”

“Can you resolve me one thing?” said De Clare. “Is there *any* purpose to be answered, *any* end to be accomplished?”

“Yes!” replied Fitz-Maurice, and his eyes beamed with unwonted animation.

“What end or purpose?” continued De Clare.

“Such a one!” exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, “as, if it were proclaimed, would make you weep, to think you had endangered its success, but by the obstruction of a hair! Oh that you could know what it is you flee! That you could discern whither it is you are called!”

“And why,” replied De Clare, “if we are not to act in that dull spirit of common natures, which you speak of—if we are not to be the drudges of the hour, and execute a homely service—if we are to look into ourselves, and find ourselves fitted for nobler ends—why, I ask, if all these conditions be exacted or implied, are we to be shuffled off from the main point? Why are we to be hoodwinked, in our own despite, and be told to feel proud, because we are so? In short, why can we *not* know what it is we

flee? Why can we *not* discern whither it is we are called? Methinks, it is no rare boon we ask when it is only this we ask."

"The quality of a prayer lies in its fitness," said Fitz-Maurice. "Crave pearls from beggars, and you ask only to be denied; entreat what cannot be bestowed, though possessed, and you do the same. A boon is rare, or otherwise, according to the ability of the giver, not the desires of the receiver. But again, I say to you, it were far nobler ye shrink not, because you have commenced, than that you proceed, because the reward glitters before you. Will not the common herd fling the taunt of fear in your teeth? Will they not, if you pause now, after what is known, cry aloud in your streets, Behold the valiant ones! whom shadows could affright!"

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed Overbury, "that was my say, only not in such choice words; and I was rated for it—called bully—pirate—shark of the ocean—and I know not what. Lay your tongues now to such revilings, an' ye dare! Belike,

it would obtain for you prompt payment of that which I still owe you."

"Pray," said Mortimer, twisting his mustachio, "might a plain man be so bold as to inquire whether you are yourself in the secret?"

"Shall I be believed, if I answer?" replied Fitz-Maurice.

"Most veritably, yes," rejoined Mortimer—"by myself—and I undertake for the rest."

"I am!" said Fitz-Maurice.

"Your proof," continued Mortimer—"your proof!"

"I thought I had your word," interrupted Fitz-Maurice, "that I should be believed. It is suspicion that calls for proofs."

Mortimer was silent; and a pause of several minutes ensued. At length De Clare, with a collected energy of voice and manner, which bespoke a resolution deliberately taken, addressed Fitz-Maurice.

"You will not deem me uncourteous," said he, "in what I am about to speak; but the occasion calls for it. In brief, then,—who are

you? whence come you? and how have you obtained the knowledge you confess to?"

The abrupt boldness of these questions excited the greatest surprise, and the eyes of all were turned upon Fitz-Maurice, to observe their effect. They embraced precisely the essential points, respecting which they all hungered for information; but De Clare was the only one among them, with firmness enough to make the comprehensive inquiry. Overbury, indeed, could have done as much, after his own fashion; but what would have been insolent curiosity in him, was the mere expression of a just and proper wish, uttered in the freedom of a manly spirit, spoken by De Clare. A momentary flush passed over the features of Fitz-Maurice, which was succeeded by rather more than their usual paleness; and Peverell observed, that he once or twice carried his hand to his forehead, as if he suffered from some pain there.

"You may suppose," said he, "that had it been my will to be known, I should not, from the first, have thrown around myself, and all

that pertains to me, the cloud of mystery, you seek to penetrate. Conclude, then, that the same causes, whatsoever they may be, which have made me thus, will keep me so. Who am I? Fitz-Maurice! No more. Whence came I? Whither I return. This is nothing, you exclaim. But this is ALL, that tortures most refined could wring from me! Tear out my heart—you cannot tear out my secret with it. Had I ten thousand lives, and you as many deaths to take them, each death more fierce and horrible than what went before, and the last, the pangs of all in one, I would not buy them off, at the price you aim at. And yet,—which, pray, note—I, who speak this, and speak it in tried fortitude of soul—believe, that ere we are one week nearer our graves, the whole will lie fair and open before you. Another word, and I have done. How have I obtained the knowledge I confess to? E'en as I have obtained the power to make you, and all men, confess me what I am. But, told I not enough, when in the Abbey I disclosed who had been the instructor of my youth? That I

told you truly, let the events which followed declare for me. And now, mark me further. In the words of this mystic exhortation, I pronounce,

“ ‘All that has been was all decreed.’

“ And by the same authority, I prophecy,

“ ‘All that must be, must all succeed.’

“ The current rolls on—and it will do so, overcoming, sooner or later, all that now frets and warps its course; till, at the last, it shall work itself a smooth and even channel, to the mighty ocean of time, past present, and to come !”

Fitz - Maurice ceased. His countenance beamed with a fervid and intense expression of sublime feeling; his lips moved in silence for a few moments, as if he were in earnest prayer; and a tear even, trembled, in his eyes, giving a liquid brightness to their wonted fire. There was a dignity, an energy, a solemnity in his manner, and a grace in his elocution, aided, as it was, by the peculiar and fascinating melody

of his voice, which had entirely subdued those whom he addressed. The wish no longer existed, to dispute his controul, or question his motives; and when De Clare, after a considerable pause, ventured to ask what period must elapse before those things could be accomplished, which depended, it seemed, upon their continued watchings in the Abbey, it was rather for his own individual satisfaction, than from any desire to scrutinize the designs of Fitz-Maurice.

“Be firm of purpose,” he replied, “for twice the time ye have already been, and all mystery shall cease.”

“Four nights more”—said De Clare.

“Four,” responded Fitz-Maurice.

“Are we agreed, gentlemen?” exclaimed Hoskyns; “if so, let me swear you on my sword;” and he drew his rapier forth.

They all kissed the weapon except Overbury, who refused.

“There needs no oath to bind me,” he said; “an’ if there did, it should be to something more than words. What am I here for, but

to do that, unsworn, which none of ye will do the better for being sworn? You call yourselves men; but must have glib phrases to make you so. Your oaths will prove as flimsy as your resolutions, I guess!"

"You have been at sea, I think?" said Mortimer.

"Aye," replied Overbury: "I had the salt spray upon my beard, before you sucked."

"It is a pity, methinks," continued Mortimer, "that you are not there now."

"Why?" rejoined Overbury.

"Because we could spare you," said Mortimer.

"Not yet," added Fitz-Maurice. "What is your complaint?" he continued, addressing himself sternly to Overbury.

"My—complaint—say you?" stammered out Overbury.

"Aye!" answered Fitz-Maurice, striding up to him. "How is it that I have failed to satisfy you alone? What is it you require, more than I have done and said, to win you? I am not the *only* man in this world, who has

a secret buried in his heart ;” and he rivetted his eyes upon Overbury, who looked, or rather scowled, at him with an air of sullen surprise.

“ Your words seem to have a meaning,” said he, “ which I do not understand.”

“ You are Wilfrid Overbury,” replied Fitz-Maurice, his eyes still fixed upon him,—“ some five years since, master of the *SCORPION*, bound on a voyage to the Adriatic. Am I right ?”

“ You are,” answered Overbury, assuming a careless tone ; “ and a brave vessel she was : a better, never buffeted the tempest or the wave.”

“ You were delicately freighted,” said Fitz-Maurice.

“ I carry not in my mind now,” replied Overbury, “ what her cargo was.”

“ On your return,” continued Fitz-Maurice, “ it was high summer, and a calm came on, off the coast of Sicily—”

“ Hush ! — hush !” exclaimed Overbury, while his hideous face looked ghastly with terror.

"I see you are moved," said Fitz-Maurice. "Another time, I'll *satisfy* you further. Enough for the present;" and he turned from him.

Overbury eyed Fitz-Maurice, as he would any one who had whispered in his ear that which he believed no living tongue, save his own, could utter. The rest were in amazement. It was evident Fitz-Maurice knew more than he chose to tell; and it was equally evident Overbury dreaded the disclosure. Yet, how the former should have been so familiarly acquainted with the circumstances he had mentioned, was inexplicable. Owen Rees felt sorely disappointed; for he expected to hear something, which would have soothed his still rankling wound, by placing Overbury in his power. Indeed, there was not one of them who would have regretted to find, that the past life of Overbury matched with their present opinions of him.

"What should we do to-night?" said Walwyn, addressing Fitz-Maurice.

"Sworn to your purpose, as you now are,"

he replied, "and, moreover, resolved beyond your swearing, the intermission of it, or otherwise, must be as you shall determine of yourselves. I may not bid you go or stay, in what respects the particular time of either. Be this your oracle," he continued, taking up the cross from a table, and restoring it to Peverell—

"Let no man fault, but—proceed."

"I wonder," observed mine host, turning to Peverell, "whether the gold signet, which you found in Fortescue's purse, has any thing curious belonging to it, as well as the cross?"

"A gold signet, and a purse!" exclaimed De Clare. "So, then, it seems, we have not either heard all, or seen all. Come, Sir," he continued, addressing Peverell, "let us know the contents of the purse, and behold the wonders of the signet."

Fitz-Maurice laid his hand upon Peverell's shoulder, and, in a half-jesting mood, said, "Share your purse with your friends; but, if you would have friends, still leave something

in your purse. It is what you keep there, not what you let forth, that keeps them."

At this moment the door opened, and Fitz-Maurice's dwarf page entered. He scarcely stood three feet in height, but had large-spread limbs, suited to a body double his size, with a monstrous head, and a complexion as swarthy as an African's. His features were as disproportioned as his legs and arms, for his eyes and mouth usurped nearly the whole of his face; the rest being concealed by a profusion of long, black, wiry hair, which descended in matted locks from his head. He crawled rather than walked—his broad feet, as he patted along the floor, resembling more the huge paws of an animal than the step of a human being. He was attired, like Fitz-Maurice, in sable vestments, and wore a dagger by his side, the handle of which blazed with the reflected hues of rubies, amethysts, and diamonds.

"Your palfrey is impatient, and so am I!" said he, (dragging himself towards Fitz-Maurice), and in a voice which grated upon the ear.

“ I come, Mephosto !” replied Fitz-Maurice.
“ Tarry yet awhile, and I come.”

“ Your courser strikes the earth,” replied the dwarf, “ and would be gone !”

“ Anon—anon !” exclaimed Fitz-Maurice.

“ He has seen the north-star fall !” croaked the misshapen lump of flesh. “ His mane is erect, and floating on the wind.”

“ I have yet a minute, then !” said Fitz-Maurice.

“ Not the beating of ten seconds !” continued Mephosto, in a voice of thunder, while his eyes flashed fury. “ My hand is on the dragon’s forked tongue !” and he grasped the blazing hilt of his dagger.

“ Malignant fiend !” exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, and rushed out, followed by Mephosto, whose countenance brightened into an expression of savage exultation.

“ Don’t you think there is a strong smell of brimstone ?” whispered mine host, to Peverell, whose thoughts, however, were too deeply occupied with what he had just seen to heed the question. Wintour did not repeat it ; but his

nose, for some time, was diligently employed in endeavouring to ascertain the fact.

“ Well, well !” said Owen Rees. “ To see what miracles and wonders there are upon the earth, as well as above it, and below it ! I have heard of the black doings of our own terrible magician, Glendower ; and I have seen, in my time, too, some very pretty witchcrafts, before I left Wales, and since ; but nothing I have seen shall equal this, I warrant you.”

“ Two hours ago,” observed De Clare, “ and I would have argued this matter ; but I hold it foolery now to jangle with any of my senses. I have bound my reason their slave for four days, and am resolved to wear my chains meekly the while.”

“ I am of your mind,” said Walwyn.

“ And I equally, by my faith !” added Mortimer ; “ so much so, that if I find myself, anon, walking home upon my head, I protest I’ll not once inquire what has become of my heels.”

“ What say you ?” murmured Vehan, folding his arms, and crossing his legs. “ You

would not let your head inquire after your heels? That were to be unjust: for your heels have many a time done the office of your head, and carried you out of dangers, from which all your wit could not have saved you."

"Is that you, Monsieur Silence?" replied Mortimer. "How long is it since you last spoke? Are you never startled when you hear your own voice? Your quips are like Christmas—we have them only once a year."

"A truce—a truce!" exclaimed Lacy. "We are forgetting the golden signet, and the treasures of the purse."

Peverell had hoped that the sudden entrance of Fitz-Maurice's dwarf, and the extraordinary scene which followed, would have saved him from further questioning respecting the signet. He would not stoop to a falsehood, and he could not tell the exact truth. He had been ruminating, too, upon the remarkable words of Fitz-Maurice, in which, as he read them, under the guise of a moral precept, he had conveyed an intelligible intimation, that the manner in which the signet had been disposed of should

not be disclosed. Not that he needed any such suggestion, for from the moment when Helen demanded it, he had been satisfied that her demand was, like the circumstance of Fortescue's murder, only a fresh link in the mysterious chain of events. He felt, therefore, that no course remained open to him, now that he was again pressed upon the subject, but to involve it in studied obscurity.

"Here is the purse," said he, in reply to Lacy; "it contains merely a few pieces of gold; and when you consider that Fortescue fell into the hands of our host here, you may well be puzzled to account for there being any."

"But the signet—where is the golden signet?" said Walwyn, turning the purse inside out.

"It is not there," replied Peverell.

"We see as much," observed De Clare.

"It has been demanded of me," continued Peverell.

"By whom?" exclaimed Mortimer.

"I must not be questioned further," replied Peverell, calmly.

They desisted at once. The character of Peverell stood too high, and his conduct throughout this business had been marked by too much of honour, of manliness, and of urbanity, to permit that they should treat lightly, or with the most distant approach to disrespect, any wish he might express. The discourse, therefore, was turned immediately to other topics; but chiefly to the point, whether they should go to the Abbey that night, or defer it till the ensuing one. It was urged by De Clare, Walwyn, Mortimer, Lacy, and Peverell himself, that the reply of Fitz-Maurice, when Walwyn asked him "what they should do to-night?" left them at perfect liberty to exercise their own discretion; and under all circumstances, that discretion would be most soundly exercised, they contended, by postponing, at least for a single night, the renewal of their watching. Nor was one consideration wholly excluded, in coming to this decision; which was, that if they went that night, they could not find the same comfortable preparations for their reception. His worship had

been informed by Peverell, of the pause in their proceedings ; and he had, of course, suspended both his hospitable and his magisterial attentions. Finally, therefore, it was agreed, not that they would positively go the next night, but that they positively would not go this night ; and shortly after they left Lacy's house.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE occurrences of this day had awakened busy thoughts in the minds of all. To Peverell they seemed like a dream. The discovery of Fortescue's body—the manner of its discovery—the appearance of Helen—the subsequent interview with her—her inexplicable demanding of the golden signet—the crystal cross and its fluid scroll—the mysterious disappearance of Fortescue's corse—the first visit of Fitz-Maurice at Lacy's—his demeanour there at his second one—his significant conversation with Overbury—and the new light thrown upon his character and situation, by the manifest power

which the dwarf had over him—the whole passed in review before him, and added fresh perplexity to his already agitated thoughts.

Lacy found himself entangled in a difficulty, separate and distinct from all considerations connected with the general current of events. He shared, with the rest, in all their feelings of surprise and embarrassment: but there seemed to be circumstances attaching themselves to the cross, so exclusively affecting himself, that he was impatient for the opportunity of confirming or annihilating his doubts.

As to De Clare, he shrunk almost from reflecting on what had passed. If there were one quality, upon the possession of which, more than of any other, he prided himself, it was that of being elevated above the ordinary passions and prejudices of mankind. He had so pampered a moody and wayward spirit, had rioted so long in the belief of this superiority, that when he found himself rebuked and held in check by Fitz-Maurice, his will led captive by him, and his premeditated conclusions dissolved in his presence, like snow-drift at the

first touch of the sun's rays, he was almost tempted to question his own identity. He had, all his life, been accustomed to lead others; and now, to find himself silenced, rather than convinced—forbidden, rather than subdued—the follower, instead of the followed, he felt at once astonishment and scorn; astonishment, at influence he had never before experienced; and scorn, that he had foregone his wonted supremacy. Hence his splenetic declaration, that he had bound his reason the slave of his senses for four days, and was resolved to wear his chains meekly the while. This confession had been wrung from his wounded pride. He could not burst his fetters, and he strove to wear them with a smiling face.

But what were Wilfrid Overbury's reflections? With what feelings did he seek his midnight pillow? A dismal crime had lain festering in his heart for years: it was hell to him whenever it reared its accusing form before his conscience, and few were the days in which it slumbered—but it was hell, tenfold sharpened and embittered, to think there walked the earth

one human being who could blast his soul with the appalling words, *thus didst thou!* And yet this withering thought possessed him now. He did not know, but dreadfully he feared, that Fitz-Maurice, by some means as awful as his own offence, was the master of his fate. He writhed in agony under the bare suspicion; and so tormenting was the suspicion, that he resolved, when next they met, to rid himself of it, even at the hazard of a certainty which he knew would destroy him.

From this groupe of anxious minds and throbbing hearts, the poor, distracted Helen must not be excluded. Possessed of the signet, and, as she believed, of all the history which Peverell had to relate, she sought her chamber, there to reflect on the past, and there to arm herself with resolution for what was to come. The image of Fitz-Maurice mingled with all her thoughts. She might as well have attempted to banish thought itself, as to forbid the intrusion of Fitz-Maurice's figure, his words, his looks, and his untold, but darkly hinted misfortunes. She knew not why; but if her fa-

ther were in his grave, she felt there would still be another in the world, whose happiness concerned her. And one short hour had done all this ! In one little hour, Fitz-Maurice had divided a heart, which, till then, was her father's only ! She blushed to think it was so : but, alas ! her blushes only confirmed, instead of denying that it was so.

And why was it ? How was it ? She knew herself no love-sick girl. It was no wandering passion of a newly awakened heart, fixed upon its fated object in a predestined moment. Her studious habits, her retired life, her severe self-discipline, the singleness of her filial devotion—every thing conspired to guard *her* from a danger to which even the million of her sex were not so helplessly exposed. She disdained, almost, to vindicate herself, even in the secrecy of her own bosom, from what she would have considered so degrading a weakness. Still, amid all this loftiness of feeling, amid all this austere schooling of her motives, there remained the undeniable fact, which she could not gainsay, that her heart yearned for the solace of

at least mitigating, if she could not remove, the afflictions that bowed down the head of Fitz-Maurice. Tears would start into her eyes as often as she recalled the thrilling tones, the mournful expressions, and the deep pathos with which (brief as the mention of them was) he had dwelt upon his sufferings; upon that history, so sad, so full of woe; that life of sharp adversity; that prolonged and ceaseless agony, which had steeped him in veriest wretchedness.

It was in vain she strove to banish these reflections; for then, others, equally painful, and some, infinitely more so, rushed into her mind. Foremost of the latter, was her approaching visit to Margery Ashwell. The night was fast wearing away, as she sat, meditating upon this trial, when Bridget entered, with a request from Lacy, that Helen would speak with him, before she retired to bed. The summons was unexpected; and she felt it could not be obeyed. There was no time for an interview with her father; but had there been, it was an experiment every way too dangerous to be hazarded. She returned

an answer, therefore, that it would be an indulgence if she might be permitted to defer attending him, till the morning. She knew her wish would be complied with; and it was; though Lacy was more than usually anxious for an interview.

Helen would have found many difficulties to overcome, in executing her plan, had not little Bridget fortunately contrived to light up a passion in the heart of Andrew Stubbs; and which passion never burned so pleasantly to himself, as when he was doing some kind office for the idol of his affections. Now Andrew Stubbs was the chief, or confidential servant, of Lacy's household, and to him was specially entrusted the charge of nightly barring and bolting, fastening and securing, all the doors, windows, gates, posterns and lattices of the mansion. It was absolutely necessary, therefore, that Andrew's services should be secured on this occasion; and Bridget readily undertook to manage the negotiation. In what particular way she carried it on—what use she may have made of her eyes and lips,—what *thens* followed certain *ifs*—as, “*if* you'll do

so and so, Andrew, *then* who knows how soon I may listen more favourably to what you are always talking about,"—or, whether there was an absolute *if*, with a positive *then*, at the tail of it, were secrets known only to themselves. Certain it is, however, that Andrew permitted Bridget to put into her pocket, a key, without the possession of which, Helen could not have quitted the house. And he further consented, or promised, to be fast asleep by eleven o'clock, and hear nothing, though his bed room was close to the door which had to be opened, and the hinges of which, moreover, creaked out for grease, whenever they were put into requisition.

Thus far, then, one great obstacle was removed. Helen, however, shrunk with the natural timidity of her sex, from the dark and dreary walk she would have to the cottage of Margery, with only her faithful and attached Bridget for her companion, whose own heart sunk within her as the hour drew near; though she would have died, rather than confess a single fear that might add to those of

her mistress. Helen, indeed, was to honest Bridget, what Lacy was to Helen herself. Any thing less than her father's safety, could never have moved the latter to so arduous an enterprize ; and any thing less than to serve her dear ladyship, would never have tempted the former to visit a witch at midnight. It was more the instinctive dread of setting forth at such an hour, to traverse an extent of above two miles, either over fields, or by narrow lanes, and an instant anticipation of those identical difficulties, which Bridget had vanquished by the power of her charms over Andrew, than any feeling of increased terror because her ordeal was to be at midnight, that had made Helen reiterate the question to Margery, when she named that solemn hour for her return.

There were several paths which led to Margery Ashwell's cottage from the town of St. Albans ; but only two of them could perplex the choice of Helen, when, in darkness, she had to pursue either. Should she attempt to explore the fields, trusting to Bridget's knowledge ? Or keep to the lanes, which though

miry, and rendered additionally gloomy, by overhanging trees, led directly to the spot? Bridget's voice was for the former : but Helen resolved to leave the decision to circumstances as they might present themselves.

It was now something more than a quarter past eleven, and Helen prepared for her departure. She gently opened her chamber door. All was silent ; her father had retired for the night, and the servants had sought their several beds. Helen was wrapped in a large velvet mantle, and Bridget had fastened on her stout winter cloak, not forgetting to provide herself with a lanthorn. Helen beckoned her to follow, and with a trembling step she passed the door of the room where her father slept. Descending a long flight of oaken stairs, which creaked beneath even her sylph-like tread, they reached the small portal that opened upon the terrace, when Bridget, fumbling for the key, discovered that she had left it on a table in Helen's chamber. " I know where it is," said Bridget in a whisper, and softly re-ascended the stairs. In a few moments, Helen perceived

on the walls, the dim flashes of the lanthorn, and saw Bridget returning, holding up the key in token of her success. In another moment they were upon the terrace, and the portal securely fastened behind them.

The night was not dark, for the moon was in her second quarter; and though there were black, and stormy clouds sailing along the sky, she gave light enough to distinguish surrounding objects. They hastily descended the stone steps of the terrace, and found the small gate at the bottom open, as had been agreed upon between Bridget and Andrew. They soon gained the public road, and in less than five minutes were beyond the limits of the town. At this instant, Helen was startled by the approaching sound of horses' feet; but before she could speak her fears, Fitz-Maurice stood by her side !

“ The hour is still ; the road is lonesome,” he exclaimed. “ Will Helen Lacy let Fitz-Maurice be her guide ? ”

Little Bridget, who thought she began to smell a rat, considered whether it would

not have been as well if *she* too had *unexpectedly* met Andrew. But she held her tongue.

"You distress me," said Helen with a trembling voice.

"I told you we should meet again," replied Fitz-Maurice; "and when more proper than at a moment like this?"

"When less so?" answered Helen.

"There is no time for words," replied Fitz-Maurice; "my Arab steed is near, and dare Helen Lacy trust herself on its back, the moments are few that would suffice to bring her to the cottage of Margery Ashwell!"

"I am attended," said Helen, with increasing confusion.

"I see you are: I knew you would be; and my page waits, no worse mounted than myself, to follow whither we go."

"I am not skilled in such ungentle exercise," responded Helen, retiring a few paces.

"There shall need no skill, lady," said Fitz-Maurice, "My fleet Arabian is fitly caparisoned for so precious a burden; and when he proudly bears it, my hand shall guide him."

"Ride, your ladyship!" exclaimed Bridget in a whisper. "Better than walking."

"In sooth," continued Helen, "I like not this. A maiden's fair name might suffer, for much less real cause, than what here seems. Why have you done thus?"

"To serve and save!" answered Fitz-Maurice, emphatically.

"To save!" exclaimed Helen faintly.—
"Whom?—From what?"

"You!" said Fitz-Maurice, with a mournful tenderness of voice. "You! whose purpose is so holy, that it might clothe you with sanctity, and hallow your very footsteps. But be forewarned—sacrilege will dare profane even the altar."

It was with much difficulty Helen could refrain from tears. It seemed as if she was doomed to trials beyond her strength, and that they multiplied about her each moment. She was irresolute what to do now; but certainly would have returned instantly, were it not that she had set forth, as she firmly believed, to save a father's life. The words of Fitz-Maurice, on

the other hand, had awakened fears, which made her shudder at the thought of proceeding. The recollection of Fortescue's murder, and the bare possibility of other perils, too horrible to dwell upon, presented themselves to her mind.

"You hesitate," continued Fitz-Maurice, "and time flies. Speak, for delay must cease. How shall it be?"

"My weakness triumphs," said Helen, sighing. "I own I have not fortitude, after what you have darkly hinted, to proceed onwards, with only this simple wench for my protection in case of need."

Fitz-Maurice gave a signal, and instantly his dwarf appeared on horseback, leading by his side, the pawing, snorting, and fiery steed of his master. Fitz-Maurice patted its gracefully arched neck, and placing Helen on its back, which he accomplished with an ease and dexterity that amazed her, he sprung into his own seat, and gave the noble animal the rein. Helen was surprised to find the saddle so con-

trived, that she sat with equal ease and security.

Poor Bridget ! When she saw her mistress bound away, without saying one word to her, (which in the confusion of her feelings she wholly forgot,) all she uttered was, " Soon be there !"

" Not before we are," croaked a voice close at her ear. " Mount !"

She had not observed that the dwarf remained, and she started at hearing him. But she lost no time in obeying his command, and began to scramble, in the best way she could, upon the crupper of the horse, when he, growing impatient, grasped her by the arm, and hauled her at once into her seat.

" Strong tug for a boy !" exclaimed Bridget as soon as she recovered her breath a little, and mistaking the deformed dwarf, for no older than his diminutive stature seemed to warrant.

The moment she was up, Mephosto spoke to his steed, and it sprang off. Bridget had nearly sprung off too ; for, losing her balance, the only thing that saved her was clinging to

Mephosto's neck, which she did with right good will, resigning the lanthorn, till now dangling at her fingers' end, to its fate in the mire.

"Hold fast!" said the dwarf, with a snarling chuckle, which bespoke that he enjoyed the consternation of Bridget. "Do you like riding?"

"I will—very much," quoth Bridget; and then muttered to herself, "devil of a gallop! what a bump!"

It was not long before Mephosto was close at the heels of Fitz-Maurice's courser, which, like his own, seemed to glide or skim over the ground, rather than to touch it. Helen even fancied, once or twice, that they cleared fences and other obstructions as if they were of no substance in themselves; and Bridget was actually astonished at finding herself, as she thought, passing through a quickset hedge without receiving a scratch.

Fitz-Maurice spoke not a word till he arrived within a few yards of Margery's cottage. He then stopped—leaped to the earth—assisted Helen to descend—and again mounting, ex-

claimed, as he galloped off, " I shall be here again, ere you are."

Mephosto, meanwhile, had deposited Bridget by the side of her mistress, and followed Fitz-Maurice.

CHAPTER IX.

It was not till now that Helen imparted to Bridget the worst tidings she had yet heard, namely, that she must not enter the cottage.

“ Stay by myself !” said Bridget. “ In this dark place ! A witch at my elbow ! What can I do ?”

Helen felt more than she considered it prudent to express, for the situation of her faithful attendant, whose fears would only be increased by the disclosure of her own. She strove to encourage her, therefore, by assuring her that she had nothing to dread from the “ witch at her elbow,” as she expressed it, and as little

from any human being. The place was not very dark, she observed; and though lonely, it was doubtless safe enough. Besides, if any thing did happen, to terrify her much, she might run every hazard, and take refuge with herself, in Margery's cottage. This alternative, under all circumstances, Bridget considered as but a ticklish kind of consolation. However, she was about to accept it for want of a better, and consented to leave Helen at the door, when she learned that a further trouble awaited her.

Helen remembered the positive injunction of the hag, in answer to her inquiry whether she must be alone. "Alone, *when* you pass my threshold, nor must man, woman, or child be within ear shot *after*." Bridget, therefore, could not approach nearer, than where she then stood.

"I shall return soon," said Helen. "And see, here is a rudely carved seat, wrought in the huge trunk of this withered oak, where you can sit, sheltered from the wind, which is sharp to-night; and be also unseen, if, which is

most improbable, any stranger foot should pass this way."

They had neither of them noticed this quaint recess before ; but at that moment, the moon emerged from a bluish vapour or cloud that hovered around it, and discovered it to their view. It was such a natural alcove or bower, (for it was evidently the work of no other hand, than that of time, which had thus fantastically mouldered it into its present state) as, at any moment but this, would have pleased the romantic fancy of Helen. Bridget peeped into it—ventured one leg—looked up, — slowly drew in the other leg—and turning herself cautiously round, sat down upon a moss-covered projection, ejaculating, " Plenty of bats and owls for company, I dare say !"

Helen could scarcely refrain from smiling, anxious, oppressed, and even terrified as she herself was, when she saw little Bridget curled up in her nest, like a snail, in its shell. But, at that moment she heard the slow, reverberating sound of the Abbey bell, tolling the hour of twelve. " Even with the hour—even

with the very hour !” were the words of Margery. The breeze that bore the awful summons upon its wings, seemed to sigh mournfully in her ears. The moon hid her light behind a ridge of murky clouds, silvering their edges with pale effulgence. Helen hurried forward, after faintly bidding Bridget be of good cheer ; and as her trembling hand tapped at the door of Margery Ashwell’s cottage, her eyes caught an indistinct glimpse of a pillar of fire, which seemed to ascend from what appeared to her to be the roof of the abbey, judging by its distance and position.

The door was opened by the old, grey, blind baboon, which Helen had observed in the morning. When she had entered, the creature closed it again, and then stretched its length along the threshold, as if to guard it from intrusion.

“ I heard you on the way,” said Margery. “ But hush !—speak not till I bid you. One earthly word pronounced too soon, and all is vain.”

Helen obeyed a motion of her hand, and

stood in that part of the room to which she pointed. With a beating heart, she watched the motions of the hag

The brazen cauldron in which she had seen the brood of rats sweltering in blood, had been removed. It was now placed within a small circle, formed of various ghastly things. Many of them Helen knew not, save that they were loathsome, and frightful to the sight. Others she could not mistake, though she could scarcely endure to look at them. Human skulls glared upon her, with eyes that were stolen from panthers, leopards; and tigers. Some had pale blue lights, dimly burning in their sockets; others, which were dark and eyeless, grinned at her with monstrous teeth, like the tusks of the wild boar; or glowing as composed of red-hot iron. There stood a coffin, not a span long, with the untimely yielded burthen of an abortive womb in it; and close by its side, the delicate white pap of the dead mother, seemingly fresh severed from the body. A knife, crusted with blood, was fitted into the throat it had cut, which lay, still dripping, in

the hellish circle. There, too, was a cadaverous heart, half gnawed away, as if it had been tossed for food to the blood-sweltered rats. A grey scalp, with the skeleton fingers of a clenched hand, tugging at the thinly scattered hairs, was beside it; and Helen fancied it might have belonged to some despairing wretch who had died blaspheming! Between these horrible objects, burned low red flames, issuing from human fat and flesh, and emitting a most noisome smell. Various withered herbs, and nameless substances of strange shape and colour, helped to complete the hideous preparation.

Margery Ashwell walked round and round, leaning on a small black stick, which in appearance resembled a twisted serpent. During the whole time, she was gabbling an unintelligible gibberish, and kept her eyes fixed upon the cauldron, in which Helen perceived a waxen image, which, though of pigmy size, seemed strongly to resemble her father. In its hand, was a tiny sword, and above its head waved a small red ensign. The image floated in a dark coloured fluid, which was seething

and bubbling up, though there were no visible appearances of any fire under or near the cauldron. Every now and then, Margery dropped in some yellow powder, prepared from the dried marrow of a self-murderer, the eyes of a basilisk, and the wing of a night raven, carrion-killed in a church-yard. This ingredient, as it fell into the cauldron, produced momentary flashes of deep crimson-coloured flame. She also took the phial in which the toad was confined, and opening it, poured in three drops of a thick, black, slimy liquid, the reptile uttering a sharp cry or shriek, as each drop descended.

Margery now laid herself flat down, with her mouth close to the ground, and remained in that position for several minutes, writhing her limbs, and pronouncing strange words. Sometimes she was still and motionless.

She arose. Her look was angry. "There is some power near, or at work," said she, "which he dreads. I heard his groan in the centre of the earth."

Helen remembered the signet, and felt it clip her finger with a burning pressure.

“ I will tear him up,” she continued, stamping her foot violently, “ though his yells affright the dead, and drive back the moon from her path in the heavens ! I am strong enough for that.”

She threw her crutch upon the ground, and exclaimed—“ Unfold thyself !”

Helen gazed with mute terror, as she saw the crutch heave, and swell, and enlarge itself, till it gradually assumed the shape of an enormous black serpent, curling and waving about in mazy folds.

“ Suck me one drachm of blood !” continued the hag, uncovering her withered neck, and dragging out a shrivelled breast.

The reptile coiled itself round her body with a hissing noise, and its eyes gleaming like two rubies. Helen shuddered ; and the hag herself screamed, when the serpent darted its forked tongue into her nipple !

“ Bravely done !” she exclaimed. “ Hold it till I bid thee ; and then void it, drop by

drop, in the cauldron! Each charmed drop is able to confound the elements, and make turretted castles rock to their foundations in the sudden tempest. But it must fall on the precious syrup made of child's grease, melted by a blue fire, kindled with lizard's brains, or it will not have power to compel Alascon when he is moody."

She then poured some of this "precious syrup" into the cauldron, and walked to the four corners of the room, exclaiming, "I call you from the east—I call you from the west—I call you from the south—I call you from the north!" She next stood in the middle of the room, and whirled round three times, saying all the while, "I call you from graves, from woods, from fens, and from rocks! I call you from the deep river and the stagnant pool—I call you from charnel houses, and the grave of the unbaptized babe!"

Helen remained motionless—silent—but almost frenzied! Her cheek was pale—her eye wildly following every motion of Margery—her body trembling. The incantation had already

gone beyond her acquaintance with such fearful rites ; and she knew Margery was now working by tremendously powerful charms—an exertion of her art which she shuddered to think was probably required, in consequence of that golden signet on her finger. She began to dread, too, lest her resolution should be subdued by the intensity of her excited feelings. Once or twice, it required all the command she could still exercise over herself, to refrain from giving utterance to her agony of mind, though she knew a single word from her, even a half stifled exclamation, would destroy the whole.

The hag now bade the serpent give the charmed blood, drop by drop ; and no sooner had the gorged creature, rearing its wreathed neck, distilled the warm gore from its opening jaws, than Helen's ears were assailed by the most dismal wailings, and by deep, hollow groans from beneath her feet. The walls shook—the earth trembled—the loathsome objects which formed the circle leaped and danced about—skulls rattled against skulls—the iron teeth chattered—the low red flames issuing

from the unhallowed human fat and flesh, blazed like torches—the thunder pealed, and the blue lightning flashed—and there were loud howling and screaming, as if the place were filled with ravening wolves and famished eagles.

In the midst of this wild tumult of unearthly noises, the voice of Margery was heard, crying aloud, “Arise, Alascon!—Alascon arise!—Ascend, mighty spirit of the future!”

Helen’s eyes grew dim: but she could faintly discern, in the centre of the circle, a bright shadow slowly ascending, clothed in purple and gold, with flowing hair of the colour of amber, and bearing a glass in its hands. A thin vapour floated round the spectre, which, though it did not obscure, was sufficient to veil the features.

A profound and awful silence succeeded to the terrific din which had just prevailed. Helen scarcely breathed. The dread moment had arrived! She stood on the brink of knowledge which her heart now quaked to learn. Her hereafter—the destiny that awaited her—

was to be spread open before her. A marble statue, chiselled to the life, might have cheated the beholder into a belief that it breathed, sooner than the bloodless cheeks, fixed eyes, and motionless figure of Helen should have been pronounced alive. She looked, a form of monumental alabaster.

“ I am here ! fell enchantress ! ” exclaimed the spirit—“ and would be gone ! ”

“ Now, maiden, speak ! ” said Margery. “ Ask—and be resolved of what you ask ! ”

Helen started. She was bewildered : she knew not what to say.

“ Speak ! speak ! ” repeated the hag—“ Quick !—Quick !—I cannot hold him while a swallow skims thrice o’er the mantled pool.”

“ The abbey !—my father !—what danger ? ” stammered Helen—but her voice was choaked !

“ Idiot ! traitress ! ” exclaimed Margery, stamping her foot furiously, “ speak what thou would’st, or I’ll tear that treacherous tongue out, and waste your young body, that thou shalt be more years dying than thou hast yet lived ! My own fate hangs upon you ! ”

Helen, terrified by the frantic looks and words of the hag, who raved like a maniac, rallied her sinking spirits.

"Tell me, if thou can'st," said she, "what these mysterious signs in the abbey portend?"

"A mighty triumph—or a dire evil," replied the spirit.

"Who shall win the triumph?" said Helen.

"He who wins thee!"

"How shall the dire evil be avoided?"

"By the blood, which is precious to the hand that sheds it."

"What is the triumph?"

"Redemption!"

"Of what?"

"A symbol."

"What is the evil?"

"The tears of the orphan and the widow. No more! I would be dismissed!"

"One question more!" exclaimed Helen, firmly. "Are the days of my father's life numbered?"

The spirit was silent.

"He will not answer that," said Margery.
"The lights burn low—are you satisfied?"

Helen remembered the signet. It was impossible she could return ignorant of the only thing for which she had undergone this terrific scene. Not a moment was to be lost.

"*If thou refuse answer to earth-born powers,*" exclaimed Helen, with an overwrought energy, bordering almost on frenzy, "*I command thee—OBEY THE SIGNET!*" and she stretched forth her hand.

At these words, the same wailing and howling, the same violent motions, the same agitation of the elements, and the same unearthly noises, took place, as when the hag's blood was dropped into the cauldron. Margery herself grovelled on the earth, at the feet of Helen, as in worship of some mighty, though unseen, power. But now, all the low red flames that burned on the ground were extinguished, and the place was in total darkness, save a cloud of radiant light which enfolded the form of the spirit. Helen stood trembling and silent.

All that she hoped or feared, all that she cared to live for, quivered on the next instant !

“ Wilt thou be answered by one greater than myself ?” exclaimed Alascon ; “ or shall thine eyes behold in this glass, that which thou wouldst know ?”

“ Let mine eyes behold !” replied Helen.

“ Then look !—Lo, shadows appear !”

A mist obscured the glass for a moment. As it faded away, Helen perceived the likeness of Fitz-Maurice, kneeling, in the attitude of devotion, at her own feet. It vanished : and then she saw herself unfastening a ponderous chain, which hung about the neck of Fitz-Maurice. This disappeared : and Fitz-Maurice was again seen clad in complete armour, bearing a cross in one hand, and with the other, thrusting a spear through the body of a hideous monster, half human, half brute, which lay overthrown on the ground. Another vision !—It was a sepulchre : and on it, in large silver letters, was inscribed, *Helen Lacy* !—The tomb slowly opened, and she saw herself, in her grave-clothes, extended on a bier ! Her

spirit sunk within her ; but, even as she gazed, the fleeting shadow passed away, and she beheld with horror her father writhing on the earth—his countenance full of agony, yet mingled with an expression of reproachful sorrow. A vulture was gnawing at his heart ! But—oh ! horror upon horror !—the vulture gradually melted from her sight, and in its place grew the figure of herself, thrusting a poignard where the beak of the vulture had appeared buried in the heart of her father.

She saw no more. She uttered a loud shriek, and fell senseless.

When she recovered, she found herself supported by Fitz-Maurice, and in the open air. The moon was shining with mild lustre above her, and myriads of stars spangled the blue sky. Her faithful Bridget was bathing her hand, which she held in hers, with her warm tears.

“ Where am I ? ” said Helen, with a deep sigh.

“ On the terrace, dear, dear ladyship, ” replied Bridget, sobbing.

"My father! Where is he?" murmured Helen.

"In bed—asleep—why do you ask?" answered Bridget.

"What is the hour?" continued Helen.

"Hark!" said Bridget, "the chimes go; it is one!"

Her scattered thoughts began to recover themselves. "One!" she exclaimed. "Only an hour: Alascon!—Fye!—It is all over!" Then looking at Fitz-Maurice, and disengaging herself from his arms,—"Are you HERE, too?" she said.

"I could not leave you," replied Fitz-Maurice, "till now—but now, farewell!" He bowed—hastened down the steps of the terrace, threw himself across his fleet Arabian, and rode off, followed by his dwarf.

"Might have staid a little longer," quoth Bridget. "How is your ladyship?"

"Better—well," replied Helen. "Let us in."

Bridget offered her arm to Helen, who leaned upon it, and with a tottering step reached the

door, which Bridget softly opened. To her great comfort, though a little to her astonishment, she found a lamp burning, which, considering she had lost her lantern, was creditable to the fore-thought, if not to the fore-knowledge, of Andrew Stubbs.

Helen asked no questions ; but hastening to her chamber, with all that silence which the occasion required, she dismissed Bridget for the night, and strove to lose in sleep the recollection of the dreadful trial she had sustained.—In vain !—Exhausted as she was, both in mind and body, a drowsy stupor, indeed, soon stole over her senses ; but wild and haggard dreams persecuted her slumbers.

CHAPTER X.

IN the morning Helen was awakened by the sound of music. At first, she doubted whether they were mortal strains, or proceeded from viewless instruments, touched by some gentle spirit, hovering near her pillow. It was not from the celestial quality of the music itself, that she was thus in doubt; but from the still bewildered and feverish state of her mind, which was thronged with shadows, and with images of things, that belonged not to this world. By degrees, the consciousness of where she was stole over her, and she distinguished the sound of a harp, which, as she now perceived, was being played beneath her window.

There was nothing very skilful in the performance ; and yet there was something in the character of the airs, as well as in the expression imparted to them—a wild simplicity and careless grace, denoting less of art than of natural endowment in the minstrel, which fixed the attention of Helen. She listened. The sweet melody was soothing to her feelings. It was like a lenient balm dropped upon a rankling wound of the body ; the anguish of her heart grew calm beneath the gentle harmony that now fell upon it.

She arose, and hastily throwing a loose robe about her, approached a window, which looked upon the terrace. It was a lovely morning : one of those parting autumnal mornings which, in their sunny mildness, and the clear freshness of the air, unite the first breathings of spring with the temperate warmth of summer. Helen threw open the casement, and the cool breeze was most grateful to her parched lips and burning skin.

The music ceased : but she observed on the terrace an aged, blind man, and by his side a

rosy-cheeked girl, with flaxen hair, and bright blue eyes. She seemed about fourteen. The servants were gathered in a group round the venerable harper; and among them was Bridget, with her kind Andrew close to her.

A half-witted creature named, or rather nicknamed, Robin the Conjuror, was capering about, throwing himself into sundry grotesque postures to provoke laughter from the rest, in which he rarely failed; and then his own laugh was sure to be the loudest of all. Poor Robin had certainly, at some time or other, had both a father and a mother; but neither he, nor any one else, could tell where or when. For many years he used to lie about in barns, out-houses, and fields, with no other care for food or raiment, than as the hand of casual charity might provide both. If a trusty messenger were wanted to discharge an errand ten or twenty miles across the country—if any assistance were suddenly needed within or without doors—Robin was immediately sought. He had not wit enough to be dishonest, or play the knave in any way. It was his supreme delight to be

employed, no matter whether reward followed or not. This quality had gained him many friends among those who possessed the very opposite quality, that of not liking to be employed; and Robin could seldom complain of having nothing to do. For the last two years he might be said to belong to Lacy's household; for though no formal act of hiring took place, he fed in the kitchen, slept in a sort of lumber-room adjoining the stable, and wore the cast-off suits of Lacy himself.

While Helen was contemplating the scene from her window, she perceived Robin skip up to Bridget and say something to her. Immediately, the rosy-cheeked girl spoke to the sightless minstrel, while she looked towards Helen, and made a respectful obeisance to her. The servants, at the same time, drew back a little, so that no one stood between Helen and the harper, who now struck his harp again, and after running his fingers, wildly but harmoniously, over the strings, he glided gently into an air of surpassing tenderness and deep melancholy. Helen did not remember she had ever

heard it before ; yet it touched so true a chord of natural melody, that she listened to it, as to a strain which was quite familiar. It brought tears into her eyes ; but they were a delicious sorrow, for they diffused peace over her soul, and seemed to let forth the grief which oppressed her, with each drop that fell. .

After the harper had played the air once, the blue-eyed girl advanced a few paces towards the window at which Helen stood, and, accompanied by the instrument, sang, in a simple style, the following

ROUNDELAY.

I.

Oh ! the maiden was gentle, the maiden was fair !
And the jewels that deck'd her were costly and rare ;
But the ring on her finger was rarer than all,
Though it blaz'd not at banquet, at bridal, or hall.

II.

Oh ! the maiden was gentle, the maiden was fair,
And her young brow was darken'd with sorrow and care ;
But the care at her heart it was darker than all,
For it wrapt it in grief like a funeral pall.

III.

Oh ! the maiden was gentle, the maiden was fair,
And she sigh'd not for love, though love wrought her despair ;
But the pang of despair, which was keener than all,
Was the pang of her SOUL for a word past recal !

The roundelay was no sooner ended than the flaxen-haired lass made another respectful obeisance to Helen, tripped up to her aged companion, and led him gently from the terrace, followed by the servants.

Helen was entranced. The plaintive character of the air itself, and the pensive manner and artless tones with which the words had been given, still vibrated upon her ear. But the words themselves ! *They* seemed to tell her own history—the history of the last few days. Yet it could not be so—it was impossible—and she felt that it would be simple weakness in her to think otherwise.

She had remained some minutes lost in meditation, when she was aroused from it by the antics of Robin, who had lingered behind, and was now dancing, jumping, and frolicking about, repeating the first line of the roundelay,

“ Oh ! the maiden was gentle, the maiden was fair ! ”
while ever and anon he cast up a laughing, merry look towards Helen, not unmixed with an arch expression of countenance, which was as intelligible as if he had said, “ and I know who the maiden is, that is both gentle and fair.” Helen could not forbear smiling ; but holding up her finger, as though to chide him for his freedom, she withdrew from the window.

Robin minded not so gracious a rebuke, for his eye caught the smile before the finger ; and he danced away into the kitchen, nearly upsetting little Bridget in a dark passage, while he continued carolling forth,

“ Oh ! the maiden was gentle, the maiden was fair ! ”
till the old steward, who was a bachelor with nearly seventy winters on his head, and had no respect for maidens of any degree or complexion, silenced him with a sound box o’ the ear.

Bridget was hastening to her mistress, when Robin encountered her as aforesaid. Helen made various inquiries about the minstrel ; but all she could learn from Bridget was, that

Robin had met with him, and brought him to give them a tune, while he danced for their amusement. He was a mere wandering harper, she believed; and the buxom wench who attended him was his grand-daughter. When he learned that her "ladyship" was listening, he said, "Now, Cicely, sing that pretty roundelay which the stranger taught you yesterday, in the cottage, where we sheltered during the storm."

"It was beautiful, and strange," said Helen, musing.

"Very—not at all," replied Bridget.

"And why did he go immediately after? Did he say?"

"Don't know, I'm sure—no," answered Bridget.

"Whither went he?" continued Helen.

"Can't tell," said Bridget; "but belike Andrew can."

Helen's thoughts now reverted to the preceding night; and with as much composure as she could assume, she questioned Bridget upon the subject. Poor Bridget, however, had but

little to tell. All she knew was, that she had fallen asleep in her oaken bed-chamber, soon after Helen left her, and had slept so soundly, that it was only when "that toad of a page," (as she called Mephosto, in allusion to his voice) was hauling her up behind him, she awoke. "We scampered along," continued Bridget, "and I was soon popped down by your side, on the terrace. You were in his arms."

Helen felt the colour mantle over her cheeks as Bridget thus plainly described what had been her situation. She knew it was not meant for saucy familiarity; but the blunt words, "you were in his arms," tingled through her veins.

"Go," said she, "and see whether my father is stirring yet; and if he be, say that I attend his pleasure to wait upon him."

Helen, while she attired herself, (having purposely dispensed with the usual offices of Bridget,) ran through, in silent meditation, all the appalling circumstances of her visit to Margery Ashwell. The horrors of the incantation made her blood freeze, as she recalled

them. But the answers of Alascon!—and above all, the visions of the glass! She recollected the words of Fitz-Maurice during his interview with her the day before. “Let the tide of time roll on. When it bears, upon its surface, the rare creature who shall unchain me from my mysterious destiny, then shall my invocation be heard.” And again: “I could end my melancholy tale, with a prayer, even to thee, fair one, so strange, yet so earnest, withal, that horror and amazement should be at war within you, as wonder is now.” These were his expressions. In the enchanted mirror she had beheld Fitz-Maurice, kneeling in the attitude of devotion to herself; and next, she was unfastening a ponderous chain, which hung about his neck! Thus, as it would seem, were the prayer he had spoken of, and the unchaining him from his mysterious destiny, shadowed forth! And thus too, it would also seem, she was, herself, incomprehensibly linked with that mysterious destiny; as if *she* were fated to be the “rare creature,” whose name “when all that was now dark should appear in noon-

day brightness, he, who *called* himself Fitz-Maurice, would worship, enshrined in his very heart."

There seemed to be an irresistible truth pervading the whole which terrified her. She reflected upon the strange influence he appeared to exercise over her feelings the first moment she saw and heard him; the deep interest his misfortunes had excited in her bosom; the ardent desire she experienced to alleviate them; the signet; his appearance, when she was setting forth for the cottage of Margery Ashwell; her conveyance back again, as described by Bridget. Everything proclaimed, as with a supernatural voice, that a resistless decree had trammelled her destiny with that of this mysterious being.

But, while she yielded to these suggestions, the horrible conviction flashed across her mind that they were derived from circumstances which led to other conclusions, of dreadful import. She had seen her own sepulchre! herself entombed! and she had seen her parricidal hand burying a dagger in her father's heart!

“Gracious God!” she involuntarily exclaimed, “and are these things to be!” She covered her face with her hands, and in silent anguish brooded over the dark prophesyings of the spirit. She felt she could not have trust in part, and reject part, as idle fantasy; she must receive all, with a confiding faith, or deny all, with a rebellious one.

A passion of tears came to her relief. “Oh, that the mystic order of these visions,” she ejaculated, “might be their real succession, if it be ordained that they shall have reality! Then would my heart be satisfied; for then should I live to do a deed of goodness, in the redemption of Fitz-Maurice from his fetters, and die, before this guilty hand is stained with the sacred blood of my sire!”

She strove to calm her grief. “I will not believe it,” she said, after a pause, and paced up and down her chamber. “All crimes are possible—e’en the foulest—that give the soul to endless perdition; but this is not! Shame upon thee, Helen Lacy! Cry out shame upon thyself, that canst so begrime thyself, though but

in ecstasy! Back, back, thou dishonoured tears, that shouldst fall from mine eyes in streams of burning fire, if the fell phantom of imagination which hath op'd their sluices, could become the purpose of thy heart. Why—what a poor distracted fool hast thou made thyself, to coin an ugly monster of the brain, and then fly from it in self-created terror! No! no! I have heard and read, how the dark instruments of mischief, which roam the unknown world, can cozen, with false shews, the inhabitants of this, and clothe in seeming holiness the unrighteous deeds that damn the doer; and I am beleaguered by such, perchance; but I have never or renounced my God, or denied my Saviour—and my feet shall not fall into their snares.”

It was in this conflict of her feelings, that Bridget returned, and informed her of her father's wish to speak with her. She knew not why, but she dreaded the interview; not merely because it would be for many reasons, an embarrassing one; nor because she was dejected and harassed: but she had a

secret apprehension of something that was to add to the already heavy burden of sorrow, which weighed upon her heart. However, she rallied her spirits, and summoning to her aid all the firmness and tranquillity she could command, descended to the apartment of Lacy.

CHAPTER XI.

THE moment she saw her father, she was convinced her prenunciation of trouble was not chimerical. His countenance betokened anxiety ; and though there were the same affectionate reception which she had ever found, the same tender greeting, and the same warm parental kiss, yet his eye wore a searching, scrutinizing look, as if he would be resolved of some pre-conceived doubt by silent observation, rather than by speech. Helen half-shrunk from his gaze ; and her gentle spirit smote her as she did so, to think, that for the first time in her life, she feared its meaning.

“ Well, my child,” said Lacy, (after some time had passed in trivial topics of discourse, which enabled Helen to recover, a little, from her trepidation,) “ and what did you think of my little regiment last night? You proved yourself worthy of joining them: for you made De Clare sound a retreat, while you left poor Mortimer dead on the field.”

“ I am afraid,” replied Helen, “ that De Clare retreated, not because he was vanquished, but because he was too proud to vanquish; and as for that trim gentleman, whom you call Mortimer, if I killed him, it certainly was not by man-slaughter, nor by knocking out his brains; but rather with a lover’s death, who expires at his mistress’s frown, and lives again, when she smiles.”

“ Nay,” rejoined Lacy; “ an’ you talk of lovers and mistresses, I must say a word in behalf of my friend Wilfrid Overbury.”

“ Overbury — Wilfrid Overbury,” said Helen; “ which of them was he?”

“ A square built yawl, somewhat damaged in the rigging,” replied Lacy. “ One who looks

as if he had robbed a church-yard of half a face, and stolen the worser half ; a fellow whose countenance would put the devil out of countenance, and keep deformity in countenance."

" Enough !" exclaimed Helen ; " I noted the creature, and wondered where you had found him. He grinned a hideous smile of courtesy at me ; but I drew back, lest he should bite. I never beheld, in human form, any thing half so brutish ! Whence came he, and what do you call him ?"

" Whence he came," said Lacy, " I cannot truly say : and I should be puzzled to give him a name that would designate him for what he is : but let a man ask me what he will be, and I have my answer ready. Fitz-Maurice, or I greatly misconceive him, holds a lash over this mis-begotten whelp of the sea, which will descend yet upon his cur's hide, and make him yell again."

At the mention of Fitz-Maurice's name, Helen felt confused, and she hastily changed the subject of conversation.

" That Peverell," said she, " seems of an

open, honest nature ; of a shrewd, discerning wit ; and has, withal, a most manly bearing. I was pleased with the manner of his narrative, though shocked at the matter of it."

"Aye," replied her father, "but you heard not all. You left the room before he related what he found upon the person of Fortescue."

"I must have done so," said Helen, "for nothing of what you now mention is in my memory. What was it he found?"

"Among other things," answered Lacy, "a purse, containing coin ; and a golden signet. The purse we saw, and the coin ; but not the golden signet, for Peverell, open as you deem him, had *his* mystery here ; and when we pressed for a sight of the signet, he said it had been demanded of him—and he must not be questioned."

Had Lacy been so seated, that he could have seen Helen, he would have beheld her like one who, walking in fancied security, suddenly finds a yawning gulph beneath his feet ; or one who sees a crouching tiger, glaring at him, and on the spring. Her breath was stifled : her

heart scarcely seemed to pulsate. It had never entered her imagination, that the signet she then wore upon her finger, had belonged to that murdered man. The thought was horrible; and, but that Fitz-Maurice had enjoined her not to remove it, till the sun had thrice and thrice descended to the west, she would instantly have disencumbered herself of the foul spoil. There was another reason, too, why this discovery at once amazed and distressed her; but she dared not give utterance to her feelings. Fortunately, her father did not pause for any reply, but continued talking.

“For my own part,” said he, “I confess I was the more curious, touching this signet, because of the extraordinary history that belonged to a crystal cross, suspended from a golden chain, or carkanet, which Peverell also took from the person of Fortescue. He wore it round his neck.”

Lacy then described, as Peverell had done, and as he himself had witnessed, the mysterious circumstances connected with this cross; observing, in conclusion, that it was a most rare

jewel, merely as a thing of beauty, to look upon. And, do you know," he continued, "if it had not been for the mystic scroll within, and the manner of its being found, I could have persuaded myself, when it was in my hand, that I held the very cross and chain which were my wedding gift to your dear mother, and which she, on her death bed, did bequeath to you ; so like it was to that."

"The sight of it, then, must have surprised you much," replied Helen, with great emotion ; "for I have heard you say, you had it of an Italian artist, who raised his price upon you, because, (as he affirmed) there was not such another piece of crystal extant, save its fellow which was in the rich cabinet of the King of Sicily."

"It did surprise me," replied Lacy, "and the more, for that, or my eyes were cheated, I discovered, in one corner, a secret mark, made by myself, when first I purchased it, as a note to swear by, if ever it were purloined. I have often thought to make you acquainted with this same token, for similar secu-

richly; and I will do so now, lest I should never do it. Is it about you?"

"No," answered Helen; "I wear it but seldom."

"Fetch it, then, my child," said Lacy, "it is worth the trouble; and I may not again remember me of my intention."

"Another time," replied Helen: "I will not forget to ask you, when next I have it on."

"Nay, nay: let it be now," continued Lacy: "besides, I can then better explain to you how the scroll shewed itself in that which was Fortescue's."

"I have it not!" exclaimed Helen, with a firm dignity of voice and manner.

"How!" replied Lacy, "you have it not?"

"That which was Fortescue's I do believe was mine," added Helen, calmly.

"Yours!" interrupted Lacy, "yours—your mother's—my bridal remembrance to her? Impossible!"

"Most possible—most true," rejoined Helen: "though how and wherefore, and, more than all, how impressed with those words you men-

tion, are to me, as to you, a mystery. Ah! do not look upon me thus! There is no taint in this business: believe it, I do beseech you! Oh, that my mother could speak from her grave! In her words should I be justified. Even as I have done, so would she: for she loved you with tenfold my love; and yet she could give you no more than I do—a whole and perfect heart!”

“My child!” exclaimed Lacy, “why do you wrong me by an exculpation I demand not? I am not your accuser; though what you utter, perplexes me greatly. Yes, my Helen! Till now—till this moment—I could say, there passed no thought through your mind, there was no action of your life, which I might not know. But I waive a father’s privilege, because I have more than a father’s confidence in all the noble qualities of your nature. Yet answer me this. Had you ever spoken to Fortescue?”

“Never!” replied Helen.

“Nor seen him?” continued Lacy.

“Nor ever saw him—alive—”

"What!" exclaimed her father, "saw you him when dead?"

"Yes."

"Where?" said Lacy.

"Where Peverell saw him," rejoined Helen.

"And your cross—"

"And my cross—my crystal cross, and chain of gold, then hung round his bleeding neck!" replied Helen, in a voice scarcely articulate.

"Can you, by no surmise, explain——"

"I can surmise," interrupted Helen, "but not explain. Yet, what my surmises are, it would be terrible to drag from me now. I am called to an arduous trial: one, it may be, beyond my strength to bear, but not beyond my daring to attempt. If you can still believe your Helen the creature of purity and honour you have ever found her, be steadfast in your belief, yet a little while, and I shall cast off the cloud that now hides me from you. Mine is no mystery, for the sake of mystery. I have played a desperate game, and played it boldly; for it is a mighty stake which I have set upon the hazard of the die."

"I do fear," said Lacy, "a stake beyond the value of the prize you throw for."

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, seizing her father's hand, and kissing it fervently. "All I have ventured—all I have to venture—weighed against that for which I venture, would be but as an atom of the vilest dust in the one scale, and in the other, the treasures of the Indies!"

"Well," replied Lacy, folding her tenderly in his arms, "I cannot surround you with an old man's experience, for I know not the advice that would adapt itself to your necessities, not knowing your necessities. It would cost me but little, to give the child of my affection that confidence I have already yielded to a stranger, were it not, that in the latter it was mine own ease only I played with, while in the former, 'tis your life perhaps I risk. However, it is done. I gave a soldier's honour last night to Fitz-Maurice—I give a father's willing promise now to thee. Only have a care you do not break my heart!"

Helen wept in silence. As soon as she could speak, she inquired if she might be permitted

to know to what enterprise he was bound by the honour he had pledged to Fitz-Maurice; and Lacy related all that had taken place after she retired to her own chamber.

While they were thus engaged in conversation, Peverell was announced; and he had scarcely seated himself, ere he communicated the death of Clayton. It appeared, that in the course of the preceding evening, an ominous change had taken place; and that at midnight all hope was destroyed, by the sudden breaking out of fetid sores over his whole body, which rapidly spread into one mass of ulcerous corruption.

“I saw him this morning,” said Peverell, “and was shocked at his appearance. It was as if a fierce fire had blistered him from head to foot, and so disfigured his face, that not a feature could be distinguished which recalled what he was when living. Poor Clayton! I have lost a friend of many years—a fast friend in adversity, and a firm one in peril! He was one of those few men who pass for less than they are worth in this world. He did not wear

his heart upon his sleeve, nor his good intentions upon his lips. His virtues were like our country's manners—somewhat of the homeliest perhaps, in their outward show, but of the true mettle beneath. There are many to whom I give the hand, and who call themselves my friends, as often as they speak of me, whom I should have less missed than Clayton, for to him I gave my heart.”

Peverell dashed away a tear as he bore this tribute to the worth of Clayton.

“ I knew him but little,” observed Lacy ; “ and only discovered in him a simple honesty of speech, and a modesty of carriage which won first opinions in his favour. How does his widow sustain her grief ? ”

“ Why, faith,” replied Peverell, “ with a very exemplary and becoming resignation. I found her, with her handkerchief ready for tears that were not ready ; and consoling herself with the reflection, that, as there were no children, the little her good man had saved would keep her comfortably enough. I know not how it is, but women, when they marry,

seem to have an easy way of calculating their expected sum of future happiness. It is, to make the most *of* their husbands, while living, and the most *by* them, when dead."

"Out upon you!" exclaimed Helen. "You rail thus saucily against us, because you have been passed by in the great traffic for husbands as not worth the cheapening; or e'en the having at any price."

"That I have stood in the market thus long, and found no one to bid for me," replied Peverell, smiling, "is an event which I am unable to say whether it should be accounted my good fortune or my bad."

"Your bad, certainly," said Lacy. "A man who passes through life without marrying, is like a fair mansion left by the builder unfinished. The half that is completed, or runs to decay from neglect, or becomes, at best, but a sorry tenement, wanting the addition of that which makes the whole useful. Your bachelor is only the moiety of a man; a sort of garnish for a dish—or a prologue to a play—a bow—without the fiddle. A wife is the other moiety

and the better ; she is the dish, the play, the fiddle—”

“ Which sometimes uttereth most discordant sounds,” interrupted Peverell ; “ as a good prologue may introduce a bad play, or a savoury garnish be the recommendation to a most unsavoury dish.”

“ Spleen, mere spleen ! Master Peverell,” said Lacy, “ and to be forgiven only out of pity to thy ignorance. He who has tasted double ale, may speak in praise of single ale, if he like ; but he who has never drunk double ale, must not expect to find his word omnipotent in behalf of single ale.”

“ How, if a man always see the drinkers of double ale, quarrelsome, or moping, or care-oppressed, melancholy or choleric,” said Peverell, “ while he who drains his cup of single ale, is ever blithe, contented, peaceful, and the very soul of good fellowship ? Shall he not hence infer, with just cause, as to the qualities of the two liquors ?”

“ No,” said Helen, smiling ; “ he shall infer, with far more just cause, as to the qualities of

the drinkers, who, in the disguise of their potations, are themselves undisguised."

"I am at perilous odds in this contest, I perceive," replied Peverell, "and may as well give it up."

The door suddenly opened at this moment, and Owen Rees entered, as if a leash of bloodhounds had him in chase, and were close at his heels.

"Who saw the Abbey last night?" he exclaimed.

"Not I," replied Peverell.

"Nor I," said Lacy.

"Then I did," continued Owen; "and I would you had both been there—mark me, for my description shall do no justice to the bare truth of what I saw."

"What was it?" inquired Peverell.

"What!" exclaimed Owen—"you shall hear. It was at the old hour—twelve o'clock—I was walking home to my night-cap, thinking of Fitz-Maurice, and the next four days, and that ketch, that tar-barrel, 'the master of the Scorpion'—and of Fortescue, and the chain and

the cross, and all the mysteries, miracles, enchantments, and wonders, mark you, that we had been talking about, when, boom ! went the bell—and crash ! crash ! crash ! whiz ! whiz ! rattle and roar ! went something else. I turned round, and, God preserve me ! I was not frightened—no, no, there is not a part about me that cries coward, let danger shew itself how it may—but if ever I thought myself in a fright, it was at that moment, mark you ! I can tell you it was a fearful sight, to come upon one unawares, and in the dark, for the moon just then—but no matter for that—I can stand to a lion, though a man who would pluck Barbarossa by the beard, and cry, *take the fig !* may yet tremble, when he sees old Beelzebub himself.”

“ As you did last night,” said Lacy, “ though thou art too shamefast to confess as much.”

“ By the soul of Cadwallader I did shake !” replied Owen, “ when I saw what I saw ;—which, mark me, was nothing less than a company of fiery columns, dancing a bergomask upon the roof of the Abbey.”

“ What mean you ?” said Peverell.

"I mean what I say," quoth the Welshman; "and meaning enough, too, I warrant. I tell you, there were twelve pillars of fire—for I counted them—in and out, up and down, backwards and forwards, like so many devils with flame-coloured jerkins, in reeling motions on the Abbey! and when the bell had done tolling, it was crash! crash! crash! again—whiz! whiz! rattle and roar! and away they went!"

"And you beheld this with your own eyes?" observed Peverell.

"As veritably as I now tell you with my own tongue," rejoined Rees.

"You are sure you were not in bed, and had a dream?" continued Peverell, with a well assumed gravity.

"If I were," answered Owen, earnestly, "it must have been a dream of two hours long, mark you; and, moreover, I must have dreamed afterwards, that I went home, and could not go to sleep, for thinking of my dream, till the third hour of the morning."

Helen dared not, or she could have confirmed so much of Owen Rees' story, as related to the

fact of a body of fire, shaped like a pillar or column, being visible, when the clock struck twelve; but whether there were as many pillars as hours, must still have rested upon his single authority. She remembered what she had herself seen, just as she arrived at the door of Margery Ashwell's cottage.

Neither Peverell nor Lacy, indeed, had any real doubts upon the subject, though they sported a little with honest Owen's half-revealed fears. Such signs and appearances were consistent, not only with what had already occurred, but with what they might expect to occur, after the declarations of Fitz-Maurice; and the tenor of their discourse soon convinced the Welshman of this, when they began to discuss with him the probable signification of what he had witnessed. Peverell was of opinion, they could only regard it as a part of the great mystery which was now to be so soon solved, and akin to that which was first seen by himself and Clayton; repeated, perhaps, though under a different form, to prick them on in the work they had begun, and

to make manifest to them that it must be finished.

"Have you," said Lacy, addressing Peverell, (and at the same time directing a look towards Helen, which she at once comprehended, as meant to allay any fears his question might awaken,) "have you, at this moment, the crystal cross, which you found upon the person of Fortescue? My daughter was not present when you produced it last night; and after what I have been telling her, it would gratify her curiosity to see it."

"Yes," replied Peverell; "here it is; I have not allowed it to pass from my possession for an instant."

Lacy received it from Peverell, and holding it up to the light said, "Aye, there are the marvellous words."

He gave it to Helen, pressing her hand gently at the time, and significantly observing, "Do not be afraid: you will only see something which you have *not* seen before."

Helen took the cross, and examined it, as if in admiration of the workmanship. *It was*

her own! Not a doubt remained upon her mind. She held it to the light, and after looking through the transparent jewel for nearly a minute, returned it to her father, saying, “*I see nothing which I have not seen before.*”

“How!” exclaimed Peverel, “nothing which you have not seen before!”

“No,” replied Helen; “I have seen such an ornament as this, ere now; and as for the liquid scroll you speak of, strange as it may seem to you, my eyes perceive it not.”

It was as she stated; for when *she* held it up to the light, the words were not visible: but when held up by Lacy, Peverell, and Owen Rees, they were as distinctly perceptible as they had ever been.

“You must be mistaken,” said her father; “here is the scroll; and, if any thing, *more* apparent, (at least, so it seems to my sight,) than it was last night. Look again,” he continued, “and go nearer to the window.”

Helen obeyed, and once more held up the cross. She started.

“Aye—now you see it,” said Lacy.

"Yes—yes," exclaimed Helen, with a trembling voice, "now I see"—and she paused.

"The words I repeated to you this morning," continued her father: "is it not so?"

"You said right," added Helen, with increasing agitation, and returning the cross to her father; "I *have* seen something which I never saw before."

Helen had cause to feel amazed; for as she looked the second time, she beheld these words, glittering before her eyes, as if formed of minute diamonds:

When next the signet is obey'd,
'Twill be the cross of Christ to aid;
When thrice the signet is obey'd,
The cross of Christ is thine, fair maid.

Lucy, Peverell, and Owen Rees, observed the agitation of Helen, but ascribed it to the astonishment which would naturally be excited by the liquid scroll. Helen herself felt her heart fainting under these thickening mysteries; and almost immediately left the room, lest her emotions should become so violent as to create the suspicion that something more than what was deemed their cause, had produced them.

When she had retired, Lacy, addressing Peverell, reminded him of what had passed between them, the preceding night, when he first saw the cross. "I told you," said he, "or, if I did not, you might have told, from my manner, that I had a special interest, distinct from the general one, in knowing the particulars of your finding it : and so I had. The thoughts that then possessed me, have since been satisfied ; and when the time comes for all these things to be laid bare, you will confess that my individual portion of the one great mystery, as appertaining to this cross, will bear comparison with any that shall then be solved."

"Perhaps," said Peverell, somewhat significantly, (for a rising suspicion began to dawn upon his mind), "perhaps, *my* mystery of the signet, and *yours* of the cross, may have an unlooked-for affinity.

"Very likely," replied Lacy ; "but now, to speak as a soldier should, what is to be the next operation of our campaign ? Watch we

to-night? And what further tidings have you of Fitz-Maurice?"

"I have no further tidings of Fitz-Maurice," replied Peverell, "and I know nothing of our future operations, save that my voice will certainly be for re-commencing them this night."

"And mine, too," added Owen Rees. "As for Fitz-Maurice, it were a pity an' he came not, do you mark; for our 'Master of the Scorpion,' may be impatient for that further satisfaction he promised him."

It was ultimately resolved that they should all meet at eight o'clock in the evening, at Lacy's; he engaging to make the requisite communications to the others, and Peverell promising to acquaint his worship therewith, that meet preparations might be attended to in the abbey.

Helen had retired to her chamber, overwhelmed with fresh anxiety. The disclosure, by her father, of the discovery of the signet; his knowledge that it was her cross which had been found upon Fortescue; and, above all,

the double miracle of its mystic words, agitated her with distracting thoughts.

“ I was not deceived,” she exclaimed, “ when, as I paused for a moment, to gaze in horror upon that murdered man, I recognised the much-valued jewel: of so dear a value, that when the hag commanded I should leave it behind (*for with that implement she should work to procure me the satisfaction I desired*), my tears fell fast while I unclasped it from my neck; as if foreboding, that when next I saw it, it would be an affliction to my heart. Alas! it was so! though, till an hour ago, the hope clung to me that mine eyes were cheated.”

It was in vain she bewildered herself with conjectures, as to how it could have been conveyed to where Peverell found it, or how it had received that two-fold impress; first, of the words read by her father and the rest, and then, on the instant, of those which were visible to herself alone. What, too, was their meaning? She longed for the moment when she should again converse with Fitz-Maurice. He alone could explain it; he alone could explain

also, the dark, ambiguous answers of the spirit Alascon; and he alone could tell what had befallen her, from the time when she sunk lifeless on the ground in Margery's cottage, till she found herself supported by him on the terrace. Thus, more and more, and at every step she took, all her most anxious hopes, all her most appalling fears, all that concerned her present happiness and future welfare, was bound up in the agency of that being. She felt as though she could not move but as his genius, evil or good, directed her; and she felt, at the same time, as if she could not resist his mysterious influence, whithersoever it might lead her.

CHAPTER XII.

PEVERELL, when he left Lacy's, proceeded at once to the mayor's house ; but on his way thither he was overtaken by a crowd of persons who were moving tumultuously along. His curiosity was excited, and he inquired what had happened. He was informed they had a thief in custody, and were conveying him to be examined before his worship. Peverell worked his way into the middle of the crowd, and beheld a tall, athletic, gypsy-looking youth, in the gripe of two constables ; while, to his great surprise, he saw mine host following close behind, with a loaf of bread under his

arm, which, it seemed, the culprit had stolen. The appearance of the delinquent was such as attracted Peverell's attention. His make was muscular, his step firm, and his stature erect. His countenance was swarthy, and overhung with raven locks, which descended in natural curls down the sides of his face. His eye was large, dark, and piercing, full of gloomy purpose, and sullen desperation. On his upper lip he wore large mustaches. There was a pleasing expression of benignity about his mouth; and his teeth were regular, and of exquisite whiteness. His dress was tattered, and bespoke poverty: but his mien and gesture were such as commanded respect. Even the rude rabble who were gathered round him, and who are always ready to insult and deride him whom the fangs of justice have caught, even they looked on with silence.

As the crowd moved slowly forward, various were the conjectures which were hazarded. Some thought he was the murderer of the man whose body could not be found—some wondered whether he was a wandering knight in

disguise ; while others gravely hinted he might be a magician—and, now they had caught him, perhaps there would be no more coil in the abbey.

“ But he has stolen a loaf of bread,” said one ; “ and if he were a magician, he need not steal bread, for he could make it out of a buff jerkin, if he liked ; or conjure all the bread in the town into his pocket, and walk away with it.”

“ Marry might he,” exclaimed another, “ as I lost a sucking pig last week, which an old witch, who was passing by, conjured away.”

“ Ah, ah,” interrogated a grey-headed man, who was hobbling along upon a crutch, “ and how did you know she was a witch ? Didst see her mount in a sieve ?”

“ No, I didn’t,” replied the first ; “ but I saw you just after, so mayhap you stole it.”

This retort created a laugh at the expense of the old man, who did not hobble quite so fast, and the crowd soon left him behind. When he was out of hearing, the one who had been bereaved of his sucking pig, observed significantly,

that " he was certain she was a witch, for her nose and chin met, her eyes were as red as a ferret's, and she talked to herself."

Peverell meanwhile had fallen into conversation with mine host, and learned from him the particulars of the theft.

" There is something very singular and striking in his appearance," said Peverell.

" He seems above his condition," replied Wintour ; " and I own it is more from curiosity to know further respecting him, than from any desire to see him in the stocks for this loaf, that I have pursued the matter."

They had now arrived at the house of his worship, and Peverell took the opportunity of speaking with him before he was engaged in examining the culprit. He promptly undertook to do the same as he had hitherto done ; but shook his head mysteriously, and whispered in Peverell's ear that " he had not heard from her Majesty's council yet." Peverell replied " he had no doubt he would soon be summoned to appear before it ; but meanwhile they would resume their watchings, and perhaps they might

thus be enabled to arm him with some strong facts against he went to London." He then informed him of the persons who were waiting without, to bring a culprit before his worship, and mentioned what appeared to be the remarkable quality of the accused youth.

"I'll find his quality out, I warrant," said his worship, "as you shall see; an' you have time to wait the examination."

Peverell readily consented, and accompanied his worship into the room, where he usually gave audiences on occasions of this kind. Being seated in his chair of state, with his clerk beside him, he immediately proceeded to business, by inquiring what was the nature of the charge against the prisoner.

"An' it shall please your worship's reverence," said one of the constables, "this vagrom is a thief."

"Oho! a thief," rejoined his worship. "What has he stolen, and who is the accuser?"

Mine host now stepped forth, and briefly stated that the culprit, after walking several

times to and fro, opposite his door, which, as his worship knew, was the sign of *the Rose*—”

“ Yes, Master Wintour,” interrupted the mayor, “ I do know ; and moreover I know that a mug of as good ale may be had *under the Rose* as can be drunk in all St. Albans ; but proceed.”

Mine host thanked his worship for his good word, and went on.

“ He walked several times up and down, as I said, when anon, though he saw me on a bench near, he snatched up this loaf from a table, and ran off with it. I ran after him, raised a hue and cry, and soon brought him back ; but while I was asking him a few questions, he watched his opportunity, and darted off again, with the loaf, like a greyhound. We followed, and a devil of a chase (saving your worship’s presence) he led us—over hedges and ditches, up hill and down dale, before we could catch him. At last he ran into a lane that had no thoroughfare, and then we secured him ; and now here he is, to answer for himself.”

“ Aye, aye,” said his worship, “ I see how

it is ; he wanted his dinner, and was too lazy to work for it ; but we'll give him a dinner and a supper, too, I warrant." Then turning to the prisoner, " Thou naughty varlet," he continued, " what have you to say ?"

The culprit, who had remained unmoved during the whole of mine host's deposition, looking with a steady glance, first at his accuser and then at the mayor, now came forward with a deliberate step, and in answer to his worship's question, simply pronounced the word " Nothing," in a hollow, but manly voice.

" You have nothing to say, eh ?" said his worship.

" Nothing !" replied the prisoner, in the same tone.

" And do you know that you will be whipped, set in the stocks, and sent to prison ?"

" Yes !"

" What is your name ?" inquired the clerk.

" I have no name : I lost it when I forfeited my honesty."

" What are you ?" said his worship.

" A man !"

"What craft?"

"None."

"How do you live?"

"Like the rest of the world—as well as I can."

"Where do you live?"

"*Here, now—to-morrow, any where!*"

"Really," exclaimed his worship, waxing a little wrathful at what he considered the saucy bluntness of his answers; "really you are a very pretty rascal. Perhaps you expect to get off by this device; but you will find out your mistake."

"I expect you will do your duty," replied the culprit; "and then, I suppose I shall be imprisoned, whipt, and set in the stocks."

"I undertake to promise you all three," rejoined his worship; "but first, I would fain know a little more of you. I am fond of original characters; and you seem to be one. What made you steal this man's bread?"

"Want!"

"Aye, aye, that is always the ready plea—

but if you were in want, why not work, and eat honest bread?"

"Who will employ me? No one! The world's doors are shut against me!"

"Why did you not eat the loaf, when you purloined it, if you wanted it?"

"There are wants of the soul," replied the youth, "as well as of the body; *mine* were the former."

"Come, come," quoth his worship, "this is trifling with the respect due to mine office: I insist upon knowing your name, that the clerk may enter it in the deposition. What is your name, *sirrah*?"

"George Wilson. Have you aught more with me?"

"Oh!" exclaimed his worship, in a tone of irony, "what, you have a name, have you, when you are put to it? I dare be sworn you have an *alias* too. George Wilson, *alias* what?"

"I have answered you," replied the prisoner, calmly but proudly. "What further questions?"

"None," said his worship. "You may take him to prison."

The constables were about to remove him, when he put them aside with a deliberate air, and addressed his worship.

"Having answered all your questions, now hear *me*. I have been brought before you as an offender against the laws. You are appointed to maintain and enforce those laws. My offence is small, and, I hope, justifiable, in the sight of Heaven!" and he raised his eyes, streaming with tears. "God knows from what motives I have acted! They were solemn ones." His voice faltered a little; but soon recovered its wonted firmness.

"It was your duty," he continued, "to take the depositions of my accuser, and to act upon them according to the law. But who gave you power, who gave you a right, to insult me with needless questions, to oppress me with mean insinuations, to wound me with your puny wit? The consciousness of that protection which your station throws around you, should have made you merciful. I incensed you by no insolence of manner, by no turbu-

lence of conduct. I bore your taunts with mildness. Surely it would become you to distinguish between the hardened sinner and the lowly one: between the perpetrator of great misdeeds, and the offender in trifling ones.

“What is the amount of my crime? I attempted to despoil this man of a loaf of bread. I had no money; I had no friends; I had no home: but I had—God of Heaven, hear and forgive me!—I had a father! an aged, helpless, blind, and dying father, calling aloud for food, and no raven of the desert to bring it him. Poor old man! I would have plucked the morsel from a hungry bear, to have given thee, rather than have longer heard thy feeble wailings for want, rather than still have beheld thy sightless eye-balls, rolling in their sockets, and turned towards Heaven to implore its pitying help!

“What had I to fear from man? From man, who is my brother—from man, whose heart should feel for misery! Three long days and three miserable nights has my father fasted: during that time has he pined, inch-meal, away;

in that time has he drunk nothing but the water of the stagnant pool; in that time has he cursed his existence; during all that time has he groaned beneath the bony grasp of death! Stretched on the bare earth, with no shelter from the inclement skies, but what the embowering trees could give him—no pillow for his head, but the green turf—no covering for his wasting body but his tattered clothes—there he lies, dark, dark, and famished!

“I have shared his hunger: I have shared his watching. I have sat by him, and longed to hear his last sigh! Every moment I expected it, and I would not leave him. His cries for food I evaded, believing death at hand. I shuddered at the thought of lengthening a wretched life a few sad hours! I sat in gloomy desperation, hoping to see him expire! Aye! look on me with horror;—I panted, I thirsted to behold that wasted form stretched in the arms of death: for what is *life*, to the blind, the aged, the needy, and the ailing? Who that is thus bowed down with the infirmities of nature, and oppressed by the

tyranny of man, would arrest the silent strides of death? Abhor the savage of the desert and the forest, who leaves his aged parent to perish—he is more merciful than we, who shut out the grave, even when we are shut out from the world, and the world's delights!

“Fixed was my gloomy purpose, and I sat, in horrid silence, by my father, heaving in the throes of death. With the green mantle of the standing pool, I wetted his lips, as often as he called for drink; when he moaned for food, I was silent as the mole; he knew not that I was near him. Heart-rending was my task, and dreadfully I fulfilled it. When the darkness of night encompassed the creation, when all was stillness and solemn gloom, then have I sat impatiently listening to my father as he gasped for life! The fever's fiery fang had unstrung his joints, and he could not move: still as he called for drink, I was at hand; but, when he bade me feed him, I answered not. Vain hope! Each morning's dawn shewed him to me, still living, but still dying!

“The length of my trial subdued my reso-

lution. The energy which despair and misery had lent me, was weakened ; the iron purpose of my heart gave way ; and when I saw my father lingering on in the pangs of death, yet struggling to live ; when I viewed his emaciated form, still triumphing over hunger and the fever's rage ; when I beheld him gnawing the very earth on which he lay to satisfy the ravenous cravings of his famished stomach, my soul yearned with pity ; and I left him this morning, with the desperate resolve of procuring food for him, at whatever hazard. Filled with this resolution I passed your door ; I re-passed it—I hoped to interest your compassion by my looks ; but you had no commerce with pity. I then seized the loaf and fled : not hastily, or I might have escaped. I was brought back. An agonizing thought of my poor father's condition came across my mind. I rushed forth again, pursued by you and others. I was deceived in that lane—I thought it led to where my father lay ; if it had, and I could have dropped the bread by his side, I would have turned upon you, and delivered

up myself without a struggle. But, it was otherwise ordained!—and now, glut your revenge: here I am, a poor, forsaken, wretched, persecuted outcast. You know my crime: you have it recorded. I would have robbed this man; but let it be recorded also, I would have robbed *him*, to feed a dying parent! Perhaps, by this time he is dead: Heaven grant it may be so! I am your prisoner. Only let me know my father's spirit is released, that it is in another world, and you may command this carcass of mine, to what part of this world it may please you to send it."

Here he paused, and never did an oration of Demosthenes or Cicero produce an equal effect. After a silence of some minutes, which was more expressive than any language could have been, mine host, in a stammering voice, addressed his worship, observing, "that as we were all christians alike, he thought, for his part, we ought to behave like christians one to another; and though he might not choose to have his bread taken away, by any Jack that had a fancy to purloin it, yet, could he

have known at the time, what he knew then, all the bread in his house, and all the meat in his larder ;—yea, and all the ale in his cellar—might have kept company with that loaf, if they could have carried comfort with them to the poor creature who had pined with hunger for three days and nights.”

His worship, who, when the dignity of office did not interfere, had a really kind and compassionate heart in his bosom, looked at mine host as he spoke, with a glistening eye, for he divined his meaning, and secretly lauded it. It was not for him, however, sitting in the chair of justice, and sworn to administer it impartially, to propound an escape for the prisoner ; but, he very significantly pointed out how it might be done, while gravely deprecating such a course. Peverell comprehended his humane intention ; and, by a timely hint to mine host, enabled him to withdraw the charge, which he instantly did, to the infinite satisfaction of all present.

“ I am free to depart, then ? ” said the youth.

“ You are,” replied his worship.

“Then let me begone,” he continued ;
“every moment is precious, and I should ill
deserve the liberty I have regained, were I to
waste it in sloth, nor fulfil the purpose of my
absence.”

Peverell and mine host proposed to accompany him to the spot where he had left his father, and the mayor’s kitchen supplied him with viands and a flagon of cordial, which Crab, who had heard the whole proceeding, placed under the youth’s arm with an honest “God bless you !” as he left the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE were many persons assembled round the door, waiting to know the issue of the examination; and when their curiosity was satisfied by the constables, who communicated all the particulars after their own fashion, and with such figures of oratory as became them, every one was as eager to befriend and pity, as they had before been to deride and insult.

They had proceeded about a mile and a half beyond the town, and were crossing a field which bordered on the main road, when the youth suddenly darted forward with a loud shriek, and rushed towards something which was lying on the ground, a few yards distant.

“ Oh God !” he exclaimed, with a convulsive sob ; “ my father !”

He stood motionless ; not another word escaped, not a groan, nor even a sigh. His father lay dead before him, and exhibited the most piteous spectacle of want, misery, and age, that ever smote the heart of man.

His arms and legs a child might have spanned. He was lying on his back, a mid-day sun gleaming on his pallid cheeks, while a raven, which had alighted on his forehead, was scared from its horrid repast of picking the sightless eye-ball from its socket ! Dreadful as this scene was, it was yet heightened by other circumstances ; and among them, by the lacerated state of the old man’s face and hands ; from which it was evident he had crawled through the opposite hedge, the thorns of which had mangled the little flesh that disease and famine had left upon his bones. In the last agonies of death, finding himself deserted, nature had rallied all her energies, and he had crawled, or rather dragged himself, darkling, along the ground,

with the expiring hope of obtaining human aid and pity. Vain hope ! Nature let her power but a moment, then resumed it, and all was over ! The shattered tenement lay an unsightly ruin on the earth, while its nobler inhabitant had taken its flight to other regions, whose awful veil no mortal can uplift.

The gipsy youth stood with his hands clasped across his bosom, (the very image of meek and pious sorrow,) the tear rolling down his cheeks, and terror, anguish, and despair, written in every lineament of his face. He gave no other vent to his grief ; but, as he contemplated his lifeless sire, and bethought him of his own inexorable purpose, remorse and pity, joy and sadness, seemed to rack his mind with contending emotions ; and Peverell, who was by his side, fancied he heard him faintly exclaim, “ Murderer ! ” through his half-un-closed lips. It was, doubtless, a self-accusation, wrung from the recollection of the motives which had actuated him for three long nights and days.

Mine host now entreated him to retire from the distressing spectacle, and arousing himself from his torpor, he leaned upon the arm of Wintour, and walked a few paces from the body. Peverell endeavoured to soothe his afflicted feelings, and his mild and tender manner had the desired effect. He knew the wants of a mourning heart too well, to interrupt it in those gentle sorrows, which, as they flow forth, ease it of its pangs. He led him from the spot ; and as they returned to the town, (mine host having undertaken to see that the body should be properly conveyed after,) he engaged him in such conversation as was most likely to blunt the poignancy of his grief.

To do good by halves, was no part of Peverell's character ; and he resolved, if possible, to befriend this youth, should he himself, interpose no obstacles. If a fellow-mortal happened to fall down in the road of life, Peverell was not one who would be satisfied with merely helping him up : he lent him his arm, and

assisted him on his journey. There is an art in making men happy, which very few understand. It is not always by putting the hand into the pocket, that we remove affliction. There must be something more ; there must be advice, and labour, and activity ; we must bestir ourselves, leave our arm-chair, throw off our slippers, and go abroad, if we would effectually serve our fellow-creatures. We must give our time, our tongue, and our presence, as well as our money. We must comfort them in their sorrows, counsel them in their affairs, stand between them and oppression ; intercede, where intercession is needful ; persuade, where persuasion can be of avail, and lend them the authority of our countenance. The doing of all this, revives that spring of action which misfortune is so apt to enfeeble, and without which, no man can permanently prosper ; it creates, in the objects of our bounty, that confidence and emulation, which produce the happiest consequences. When, to this active and effectual benevolence, the more prompt

efficacy of money is added, how great and how lasting, may not the good be ! Few, however, possess this quality of philanthropy ; for it costs *less* to give a guinea, than to give an hour.

“ You are without a home, without a friend, and without money,” said Peverell, as they walked along ; “ let me supply you with all.”

“ I am, indeed, friendless, homeless, pennyless,” replied the youth ; “ yet I cannot accept your generous offer. *My* resting place, if ever I tread it again, is across the wide waste of waters.”

Peverell forbore to urge questions which evidently disturbed him. It was necessary, however, that present shelter and sustenance should be provided, and he suggested that he had better remain at his house for a day or two, at least, until the interment of his father's remains.

“ No !” said the youth ; “ let my treatment be, as my condition is. Your poor-house, or whatever other place you have for vagrant wretchedness, will be a fit asylum for me. I

will sojourn here till I have seen my father in his grave, and then, with such means as the hand of charity may supply, pursue my pilgrimage to the clime of my birth."

"You are not a countryman, then," said Peverell?

"I am not; and I should have thought my tongue had proclaimed my foreign extraction. I am a Venetian: but the calls of business have frequently conducted me to your shores. A wrong—a base and malignant wrong—done my father and myself, by an Englishman who had constant traffic with our Venetian merchants, brought us hither, some six months since, in pursuit of vengeance! How we were foiled, and by what unlooked for mischances, reduced to the sad condition which made me a parricide in heart, and then a robber, it would madden me to tell. But," he continued, (gnashing his teeth, and with a motion of his clenched hand, as if he felt a dagger in its grasp, and was directing its aim,) "revenge defeated, is not our country's reproach: and wherever the rank villain may

now hide his head, I do not despair of taking down his hot blood by our Italian method !”

When Peverell found that the resolution of the youth was inflexible, the only course which he considered open to him, was to conduct him back to the mayor's, it being within his jurisdiction to make such provision for his immediate wants, as he would consent to accept. He accordingly did so ; and while there, he was joined by mine host, who took an opportunity, when his worship was conversing with the young Venetian, to draw Peverell aside. It was to communicate to him, that he had discovered, round the neck of the old man, fastened to a piece of silken cord, the miniature he then held in his hand. He gave it to Peverell. It was the resemblance of a lady, in the bloom of youth and beauty, but whose countenance was overshadowed by a tender air of melancholy which rather heightened than diminished its lustre. Peverell looked at it for some moments, with feelings of admiration, excited no less by the peculiar loveliness of the face, than by the high and exquisite finish bestowed upon it by the

artist. He approached the youth, and presented it to him. At the sight of it he started. His countenance exhibited the most violent emotions ; and he eagerly thrust it into his bosom. After a pause, he exclaimed, addressing Pe-verell,

“ Oh ! if you knew the tender, melancholy story that belongs to this picture, and how the destiny of my departed sire was connected with that image of beauty, you might feebly comprehend what a treasure it is to me. In the midst of my affliction, I had forgotten it ; and but for you, it might have fallen into sordid or vulgar hands, who would have purloined it for its paltry value.”

The offer was renewed, on the part of Pe-verell, to receive him in his house, and the mayor also pressed him to stay where he was ; but, with an inexplicable pertinacity, he adhered to his resolution of being treated as no other than a mendicant or pauper. Whether it was in the bitter spirit of untameable pride, which made him disdain to receive, in his present condition, any thing beyond what that condition could

claim from mere humanity ; or, that he mingled with his sense of the wrong which one Englishman had done him, a scorn of all ; or whether he could not endure the thought of participating, immediately, in comforts and enjoyments which had been denied to his wretched father, in the last hours of his existence—whether, in fact, it was from the influence of any one of these feelings, or from a motive compounded of them all, it was impossible to know ; for he was profoundly silent as to his reasons. It was finally settled, however, by his worship, that mine host should provide him with bed and board at the town's expense ; and he soon after left, to take up his quarters, once more, at *the Rose*, though under somewhat different circumstances.

CHAPTER XIV.

At the appointed time they were all assembled at Lacy's house, and it was speedily resolved they should proceed to the Abbey by ten o'clock ; that hour being proposed by Walwyn, in half jest and half earnest, because they were now reduced to ten in number. When this was suggested, however, Peverell stated that he had been visited, since their last meeting, by two of their townsmen who were exceedingly desirous of being permitted to join them. They were persons of good repute, and in no respect unfit to become their associates ; but they ridiculed the idea of there being any mys-

tery in the business, and seemed thoroughly satisfied that if they could only once be present, they should either instantly detect the imposture, or discover the natural causes of the things that had been bruited about. He had not ventured, upon his own motion, he said, to comply with their wishes ; but he promised to do, what he was then doing, mention them ; and if no objections presented themselves, they were to receive a communication from him.

It was doubted at first, whether any increase to their numbers would be approved of by Fitz-Maurice, whom they now recognized as their director, and whose assent or dissent would regulate their own. But, when it was understood, that in all probability, he would not be with them that night, (no intimation of such intention having been received) and that, therefore, he could not be consulted ; while on the other hand, nothing had ever fallen from him, which distinctly prescribed any particular number, or even any particular description of persons, it was at once determined to admit the applicants. Peverell, accordingly despatched

a messenger, appointing them to be at the Abbey door a few minutes before ten.

"I prophecy they will return more than satisfied," said Mortimer.

"I warrant you," added Owen Rees, "or why, I pray you, the fiery vagaries I saw last night?"

The Welchman being called upon to explain his meaning, related nearly as he had done to Peverell and Lacy, the story of his twelve devils in flame coloured jerkins.

De Clare laughed aloud.

"You may laugh," said Owen, "but I can count, mark you; and I am a calf, if there were not twelve."

"Hours, do you mean?" replied De Clare.

"No," said Owen, with a vehement spluttering; "twelve fires of pillar, bobbing about in the roof upon the air of the Abbey: twelve fires of pillar, mark you."

"I did mark," answered De Clare; "and as I am a man, and no calf, there was only one! I grant you, that one waved and flickered, and

bellied itself into a seeming many : but it was still one—only one, Master Owen."

" Did *you* see it ?" inquired Rees.

" I did," said De Clare.

" Oh," quoth Owen, " then I'll not be pertinacious, mark you ; and more particularly since you allow that it looked a many."

" I saw it too," said Overbury ; " for I have slept more soundly in howling tempests, rocked upon the mountain billows, than I could last night in my bed. As I stood at my window, and read what weather we should have, by the rack of the clouds, I beheld this thing you talk of ; and I wished I had been in the Abbey to give an account of any doings that might be going on."

Peverell interrupted this conversation, by mentioning the death of Clayton, and relating the adventure of the Venetian youth. The former was so generally expected, that it excited little surprise, though the ordinary expressions of regret were not omitted on the occasion : but the latter produced much inquiry and conjecture. Mine host stated that he remained at his

house, still preserving an unbroken silence (except brief replies to any questions that were put to him), and scarcely partaking of the food or drink that was spread before him.

Their discourse now wandered to other subjects ; but there was evidently a common reluctance to converse upon the object of their meeting, as they had hitherto done. Every allusion to it, was either studiously avoided, or quickly abandoned. In truth, their situation had undergone a great change. Heretofore, they were in the condition of men, who had spontaneously engaged in an investigation which they felt themselves free, at any stage of it, to renounce or continue. They might treat it gravely, or otherwise, as it suited their several humours ; while each was at liberty to terminate his own individual attendance, if it so pleased him.

But this was no longer their condition. They had merged their separate rights, in one general obligation. They had bound themselves by the solemnity of an oath, and what was equally strong, by reciprocal pledges, come what might, to have four more watchings. Perhaps, it was

the consciousness of this compact, (which assumed something of the character of necessity), that diminished their alacrity and zeal ; or perhaps, each of them gloomily anticipated, (though no one confessed as much), some disastrous consequence to himself. Certain it is, there was a dull and cheerless tone in their conversation, this night, which had never prevailed before.

It might, indeed, be partly explained by the individual anxieties which had arisen. Lacy, for instance, was troubled about Helen, and felt uneasy under the mystery of her cross ; Peverell was depressed in consequence of the death of Clayton ; Overbury groaned in apprehension of Fitz-Maurice : De Clare wore his self-imposed fetters impatiently ; and Owen Rees had not got over the qualms produced by his twelve dancing devils. Even Mortimer had had a personal quarrel with himself that day, and was out of humour ; for he had discovered a carbuncle on his nose, which three hours of patient bathing with an infallible lotion had not removed. As to Vehan, he was at any

time but a foggy companion ; and this night, his melancholy visage might have scared laughter from the dimpled cheeks of a school boy, home-going for the holidays.

With such elements for drowsy fellowship, (mine host never rising to the level of familiarity,) it was no wonder that Walwyn grew reserved, or that Hungerford Hoskyns could not rally himself into his usual vein of careless, random talk. He made one or two attempts ; but met with such a chilling reception, that his tongue seemed to freeze in his mouth.

At length the time arrived for them to repair to the Abbey.

“ Shall we go ? ” said De Clare.

“ I think so,” replied Lacy.

“ Have you the keys ? ” asked Mortimer, addressing Peverell, and feeling the end of his nose, all the while, with the tip of his little finger.

“ Yes,” responded Peverell, and put on his bonnet.

This was the signal for all, and they set forth. In a few minutes they were at the Abbey, where

they found the candidates, of whom Peverell had spoken, waiting.

Peverell opened the doors, and they entered. But what was their amazement when, the moment Peverell had crossed the threshold, and before the two strangers could follow, they saw the portals close with such violence, that the noise pealed along the lofty aisles like thunder? In vain they strove to open them again; no force they could use was sufficient to turn the key. They hallooed to those on the outside: but no answer was returned.

This was sufficiently explained the next day, when they learned, that at the instant of the sudden closing of the doors, the two sceptical townsmen, who were to discover every thing, received such a hearty thwack on their heads, that they fell prostrate. In this plight, sprawling on the ground, they lay for nearly half an hour, perfectly sensible of their situation, and very desirous of changing it, but without power to move either hand or foot. They described the blow, not as if given by a hand, or a good crab stick; but as though a mass of dense air had rushed

past them with exceeding velocity. When, at length, they recovered their feet, they walked quietly home ! They were thoroughly satisfied ; for, as they could not tell either how they were knocked down, or how kept down afterwards, on the *outside* of the Abbey, they thought they had better leave the mysteries of the *inside*, alone.

A momentary feeling of terror came over Peverell and the others, when they found themselves imprisoned by such means. It was some minutes before they moved from the door, round which they stood, each trying his own skill or strength, to unlock it. What added to their fears, was the very natural, though not very comfortable reflection, that they might have to remain there the greater part, if not the whole, of the night. At all events, they could expect no assistance, till a sufficient time had elapsed for the alarm which their lengthened stay would excite, to diffuse itself. Lacy, at length, broke silence :

“ Confront the danger you see ;” said he, “ but wait, till that which you expect, shows itself. Let us to our seats.”

He walked, or rather marched, with a firm step,

towards the table, which stood, as before, at the further extremity of the aisle. The rest followed. Overbury swaggered along, growling half-formed oaths, and looking right and left with an air of real, or admirably counterfeited, indifference. When he reached the table, he filled out a cup of wine and tossed it off; another, and tossed that off too; then a third, which he also drank, exclaiming—"Ha! ha! 'tis thus I wait for danger!"

No one followed his example; but quietly seating themselves, Walwyn, after a short pause, observed, that they had recommenced with something like an earnest of future wonders.

"Yes," said Mortimer, with an effort to be jocular; "and I protest, I would rather be locked in here an hour in earnest, than all night in jest! I like not such jests,—unless I had my night-cap in my pocket; and even then, with only cold stones for a bed, I should be tired of the jest before morning."

"I don't think these tapers will burn more than three or four hours," observed mine host,

with manifest trepidation: "they are not above half the length they were last time; and it would be marvellously unpleasant to sit in the dark."

"All the better," exclaimed Overbury, "for then you will not be frightened by looking at one another, which may chance to happen else. But why don't you drink?" he continued, filling his cup again; "and light up a fire within, which will not only warm you, if you are cold, but kindle the flame of valour in your hearts, be they ne'er so dead."

Overbury had created a sort of solitude around himself. He drank alone—talked alone—and almost sat alone; for on either side of him were the vacancies occasioned by the melancholy absence of Clayton and Wilkins. His was that unenviable privilege which men sometimes contrive to obtain: the privilege of having every thing their own way, because they are not worth a contradiction, for the sake of argument; and still less, at the price of a quarrel. De Clare, indeed, with his atrabilious temperament, was often at war with himself, to quell

the risings of scorn within him, and keep back the gall-clothed words that crowded to his lips : but for the rest, they felt, merely, that chance had yoked them, for a few days, with a ruffian ; and like men having to walk between tar-barrels, they endeavoured, as well as they could, to avoid defiling themselves.

Even honest Owen began to think there was absolutely *less* disgrace in submitting to be called a “ mountain goat ” by such an antagonist, than in avenging the insult ; albeit, this conviction had not become very strong, till after Fitz-Maurice had shaken his scourge in Overbury’s face. It was only when his tongue grew gross and licentious, which it generally did, as the fumes of wine made him less craftily circumspect, that it became necessary to silence him ; and a few cool words were always sufficient. As for Overbury himself, he was such a mere outside of a man, and so bare, within, of all affections, appetites and passions, but what were vile and brutish, he could not perceive, and therefore did not feel, either the supreme contempt or deep abhorrence, which he inspired.

He spoke, when it was his humour ; drained cup after cup, when the wine was before him ; and took his lonely seat at the board, with superlative indifference, whether he was spoken to, drunk with, or sat by.

They had been about half an hour in the abbey, and conversation had been kept up, like the firing of minute guns, each letting off an observation, or an answer in his turn, when Mortimer began to hum an old Troubadour air.

“ I wish I could warble,” said he, “ and had sweet music in my voice, I would enliven you, with a simple ditty ; by my faith I would ; for there is divine power in melodious sounds—”

“ To -lull the tooth ache, if they put you to sleep,” interrupted De Clare. “ I had as lief hear a moonlight serenade on the house top, by a whiskered convocation of love sick cats, as your amorous ballad-monger, who sighs out a stanza of whimpering words about ‘ bleeding hearts,’ from ‘ Cupid’s darts,’ and ‘ the bliss of blisses’ in ‘ love’s true kisses.’ ”

“ I wish I could hear such a serenade just now,” replied Mortimer, “ for I would fain laugh ; and there be three things, in this world, which never fail to make me laugh.”

“ Imprimis—” said De Clare.

“ Imprimis,” continued Mortimer, “ those serenades you talk of (and, by the soul of music, I admire your taste, ’tis excellent); then, the sonorous bray of an ass ; and lastly, the plaintive strains of an elderly pig, who, having arrived at his years, thinks he is old enough to go alone, and protests loudly against the indignity offered to his hind leg. Oh, Jupiter ! If I am to die as becomes a gentleman and a christian, let not my last hour be invaded by any one of these sounds ; or certes, I shall go out of the world by the antipodes of my coming into it, and laugh as heartily as e’er I cried, when the midwife first exclaimed, ‘ by this token, ’tis a chopping boy ! ’ ”

This unexpected sally of Mortimer produced a momentary burst of mirth from all. Overbury roared. Even De Clare’s lean cheeks wrinkled themselves into a smile, while Vehan’s

leadene eye brightened with a flash of meteor-like gaiety : seen and vanished. Who that had looked upon them at that instant, would have said they were assembled to await the coming of visitations, — from the world of shadows, perchance ? So curiously are entwined, so wonderfully are blended, in us, the various springs, which as they are touched, make the heart pass from joy to grief, from hope to despair, and from melancholy to gladness !

Their discourse now became more animated and cheerful, though still it kept wide of the business in which they were engaged. Anxious and hurried glances were cast, every now and then, round the Abbey : at times, there would be a sudden silence, listening to fancied noises, and then, they would look at each other, with speaking eyes, that told their thoughts, as plainly as could their tongues.

Thus they passed the first hour ; by which time, a few flowing cups, and Mortimer's spriteliness, had imparted some elasticity to their spirits.

"I think," said Walwyn, "if my kinsman be not too contemplative, he might conclude that choice ballad, or metrical romance, or whate'er it is he calls it, of Alice Gray."

"Well suggested," said De Clare. "We all seem, to night, more inclined to be listeners, than talkers."

"Sleepers, you mean," sighed forth Vehan, unfolding his arms, and thrusting one hand into his bosom, as if intending forthwith to resume his meditations.

"Yes," said Hungerford Hoskyns, "sleepers we are like to be; and all in one bed; but it is large enough to lie without jostling."

"And high enough," added Mortimer, "to be cool and airy."

"With four stone walls for your curtains, and this pavement for your feather bed," said Owen, "you'll not be sluggards in the morning, I warrant you."

"No—nor snorers in the night, as I guess," replied Hoskyns.

"More likely chatterers," added Mortimer; "such at least, as have teeth among us. But

we do well to sport with our misery ere we feel it. When it pinches us, and our green and yellow cheeks, blue lips, and aguish bodies, shall make us sigh for a Smithfield luxury, roasting by a slow fire, I'll engage to write all the jests we then utter upon my thumb nail; aye, and let the first man who laughs, make a foot-ball of me—kick me up and down, to keep himself warm."

"Wilt thou be our mountebank, *now*," said De Clare, "and amuse us? If not, why, with thy parrot tongue, dost thou interrupt the entertainment that *is* provided?"

"Do you know, De Clare," replied Mortimer, gaily, "you often put me in mind of one of those great egg-bellied spiders, which it was my delight, in my school-boy years, to watch by the hour, in some dark nook of my father's garden? The wily monarch of the web lay treacherously in one corner, watching for some gilded fly, fluttering in the sunbeams, which he might rush upon and devour, the moment it was enmeshed. Thus far my para-

ble, and this its application : *you* are the great egg-bellied spider—*I* the pretty gilded fly, whom you would fain devour, but cannot. And now for the entertainment which you say is provided.”

Walwyn repeated his request to Vehan, wishing to interfere between Mortimer and the caustic retort, which he saw De Clare was preparing. Peverell, Hoskyns, Lacy, and the rest, joined their solicitations.

“ I swear,” said Vehan, “ by the insulted dignity of my muse, I will not again profane her inspirations, and administer them to you like a dose of poppies. No more of my university rhimes, to weigh down your eye-lids, and make you all forsworn, when you wake. But,” and he sighed grievously, “ if it may content you, to hear in homely prose, what befel Dame Alice on that fearful night, I will labour for your satisfaction.”

“ It shall content us,” said De Clare ; “ so proceed.

Vehan looked exceedingly dismal ; but he

began ; and, as on the former occasion, when he had once given his tongue the license to speak, his manner was impressive, and, occasionally, even animated.

CHAPTER XV.

“It would be difficult,” said he, smiling, “to say at what part of my ballad metre each of you fell asleep; so I must bid you fancy Dame Alice arrived at her journey’s end; much terrified, and sorely jolted. But whither she was brought she knew not; for the bandage on her eyes was not removed till she had been led up many steps, across spacious halls, along echoing passages, and through numerous chambers, to the one in which the lady was who needed her assistance. It was then taken off, and she found herself in a large room, filled with rare furniture, such as might denote a regal mansion almost.

“There were no persons in the room, but a tall, portly man, richly dressed, who was striding up and down, in great agitation; and the lady herself, who lay moaning on a bed that stood in one corner. They who had conducted Alice, retired immediately after they had untied her eyes.

“‘To your mystery—’ exclaimed the man, with a stern voice, pointing to the bed; and at the same time stirring up the logs of wood which blazed on the hearth.

“Alice approached the bed. On it lay a lady, beautiful and young, from whose eyes the tears fell faster than did sighs and groans escape from her bursting heart. Alice strove to soothe her: but she refused all comfort.

“‘This is cruel mercy!’ she cried. ‘Let me rather die by thy hand, and my innocent babe be unborn, than kill me with thy savage purpose. Though guiltless, I am content to die!’

“‘What sayest thou, dear Lady?’ replied Alice; ‘nay, be comforted!—’tis a heavy pain to bear; but thou wilt smile, anon, when this pennyworth of grief buys thee a groat of hap-

piness. There now!—that was a kindly throe—patience, chuck!—patience, dear heart!—Aye, aye, 'twill soon be over, and you a joyful mother!—there—there—bear up!—belike it is your first-born you labour with.'

“ ‘Aye, and her *last-born*!’ exclaimed her husband; for he it was, who paced the floor with hurried strides,” observed Vehan, “and whom, for the convenience of my narrative, I shall call Lord Eustace.

“ ‘No, no, I’ll warrant you—not her last born,’ replied the old crone, with a leer and a chuckle: ‘these fair limbs shall bear many a rich burden yet.’ ”

“ ‘Peace, beldam!’ said Lord Eustace, ‘and do thine office with a silent tongue!’ ”

“ ‘I protest,’ interrupted Mortimer, addressing Vehan, ‘thou art an excellent old woman, and dost narrate to the life—e’en as if thou hadst overheard all, and, with an admirable memory, didst repeat only what was said.’ ”

“ ‘How many groanings have you been at?’ said De Clare, ‘that you esteem yourself so nice a judge? But I wish you would do your

office, which is that of a listener, with a silent tongue."

"Then would he do more than Alice did," continued Vekhan; "for still the garrulous dame went chattering on; though she did not venture to cross her moody master with another ribald jest.

" 'Hey-day! and alack for shame!' cried she, a minute or two after, 'where be the needful gear for the precious babe, when 'tis born, and the fitting preparation for the lady mother? I must be better provided, or all my art and care may fail to prosper. Now, the Lord forgive me! But my aged eyes are purblind, though, truth to say, they should all be ready to my hand.'

" 'Silence, witch!' roared Lord Eustace, as he griped her shoulder—'silence, and despatch. Give *me* the thing you wait for, and you shall have gold—aye, gold enough to strew with ease the few years that lie between you and the grave, so that you may work no more.—Here,' he continued, placing a well filled purse in her hands, 'let my reward fore-run your

deserving ; and now with speed o’ertake it ; for my impatience will not wait much longer.’

“ ‘ Oh, God ! ’ exclaimed the lady, ‘ wilt thou permit this iniquity ? Wilt thou wink at this monstrous crime, though, as yet, intention only hath committed it ? ’

“ ‘ What sayst thou, wanton ? ’ cried her husband, as he drew back the curtains at the foot of the bed, and looked fiercely upon his miserable wife, in her extremity of grief—what sayest thou ? ’

“ ‘ I but prayed to heaven,’ said she, sobbing violently, ‘ for mercy on thy unborn child ! ’

“ ‘ *Mine!* lewd devil ! ’ he exclaimed—‘ mine ! adultress ! Out upon thee, obdurate liar ! ’Tis the bastard fruit of thy lustful wickedness with the base hind who already lies low for his share of the brat ! ’

“ ‘ Heaven pardon thee thy foul suspicions,’ said the lady, ‘ and turn thy heart from its horrid purpose ! I would that my soul were as pure from all other sin, as it is from this stain of thy distempered fancy ! Then might I bid the angels of Heaven prepare to receive me ! ’

“ ‘ Wilt thou confess ?’

“ ‘ What ?’

“ ‘ That my bed—this bed, whereon the fullness of thy guilty act hath now stretched thee in a teeming mother’s pains—hath been dishonoured—hath witnessed thy unlawful love, and the blistering shame that burns upon my brow?’

“ ‘ Never !’

“ ‘ Not though it redeemed the now struggling burthen of thy false womb from the sacrifice that awaits it ?’

“ ‘ No ! God’s will be done, I say ! And if it be his will that I should hear my innocent babe, mingling the tender cries of new-born life with the sad shrieks of an instant and most terrible death, why be it so ! But I will not, guiltless as I am, brand myself with infamy—I will not proclaim my lawful issue adulterate—I will not—I, the daughter of a virtuous and honourable stock, write myself a strumpet !’

“ ‘ Why, you *are* one !’ replied Lord Eustace, with a cold, malignant sneer.—‘ A notorious one ! There is not, in the harlotry of the most rank brothel, such another !’

“ ‘ For shame, my Lord, to say so !’

“ ‘ Ten thousand shames on thy hot blood and polluted body, that warrant me to say so !’

“ ‘ Why, have you ever denied me the proof of your unjust suspicions, when I have called for them ? If you know me guilty, you must know when, and how, and with whom ? Tell me each circumstance, of time, of place, of person, the belief whereof hath made you wrong me so grievously : and if I cannot disprove all, and come out of the trial as holy as grace itself, then hew me limb from limb ; let your vengeance make piece-meal of me, and cast my disloyal remains for carrion birds to feed on !’

“ ‘ I cry you mercy !’ said Lord Eustace. ‘ A woman’s subtlety to hide her wantonness, is never less than her will to practise it. I am not so dull in the world’s craft, as not to know, that when we fall from heaven, hell stands open to receive us ; and the devil is a shrewd counsellor.’

“ ‘ Alas ! alas !’ exclaimed the poor sufferer, who hardly heeded her body’s pangs, in the

o'er mastering anguish of her mind,—‘that truth should be so weak in her own cause !’

“Thou false one !” continued her husband, with increasing fury.—‘Thou matchless hypocrite !—thou cunning pander to thine own heart’s lechery !—thou knowest, even better than I can tell thee, how lewdly thou hast broken thy marriage vows, how grossly thou art foresworn ! Aye, let fall thy tears,—they are the bitter waters of shame for guilt, which they can never wash away. Oh !—but that I am armed in proof, and that my burning wrongs quench them as they fall, I should grow frantic to see my once soul’s idol, the peerless creature whom I loved, as if the whole world’s perfections lived all in her—thus the prey of sorrow !’

“ ‘Believe me, and you may, my lord !’ she exclaimed, in a low and scarcely articulate voice, ‘I am innocent !’

“ ‘It is too late !’

“ ‘Then God’s will be done, I say again ! and may his pardon reach thee, Lord Eustace ; thou

injurious husband, and most false accuser of thy most chaste wife !'

" ' Amen ! to that, with all my soul,' he exclaimed, and walked to another part of the room.

" Dame Alice had listened to this sad dialogue with fear and trembling. But now, she resumed her attentions towards the hapless lady, whom, in defiance of the rebuffs she had already received, she tried to console. Meanwhile, nature was hastening the moment of relief, and before the expiration of another half hour, a man child was born.

" ' The blessing of Heaven be upon thee, thou pretty one !' exclaimed Alice, as she held it in her arms ; ' thou art as like thy misgiving father as two peas !'

" ' Is it alive ?' said Lord Eustace, rushing towards Alice.

' Aye, I warrant !' she replied ; ' and with a sweet smile upon its face, as if it had come into the world only to outface the villainous suspicion of its begetting.'

“ ‘ Give it me !’ and he tore it from the mid-wife’s arms.

“ ‘ Mercy, mercy !’ exclaimed the mother. ‘ Be a man, if the yearnings of a father are dead within thee !’

“ ‘ Aye !’ he continued, looking at the infant, while his features were convulsed with rage—
“ aye !—aye !—here is damning proof !—how the paramour mocks me in every feature !—how legibly bastard is written upon this brow ! Out of my sight, thou blot ! thou lust-begotten, false-engendered patch !’

“ The lady uttered a piercing shriek ! Alice stood aghast ! ‘ Oh, God !’ she exclaimed, and buried her face in the pillows of the bed.

“ The maddened husband, and self-denying father, with the look and gesture of a demon, cast the innocent babe upon the blazing fire, and then heaped upon it the burning embers ! Its screams were loud and terrific ! The noise of its crackling flesh, as it shrivelled up in the fierce flames, could be distinctly heard ! But in less than a minute all was still, except that one appalling sound !

“ ‘ My revenge is satisfied ! ’ said he, as he turned round the now blackening and fast consuming body of the child, while at the same time he thrust it further beneath the flaming brands. ‘ No spurious issue, sprung from other loins than mine, lives now to call me father, and in that same word denounce me cuckold ! For thee, thou vile confederate in this act,’ he continued, approaching the bed, ‘ live, if Heaven will have it so ; but live a banished woman from the world, and pass thy rest of life in the cold observance of cloistered chastity, and the daily penance of penitential prayer ! ’

“ ‘ Poor soul ! ’ said Alice ; ‘ I do believe her gentle spirit hath taken its flight already. She never spoke nor moved, after you tore her sweet babe from me ; but uttered one dismal shriek, when—’

“ ‘ No more ! ’ exclaimed Lord Eustace, as he gazed upon the pale features of his wife. ‘ If what you say be true, your task is finished—and it would grieve me more to find it is not, than that it is. If guilt like hers can survive an hour, virtue should be immortal.’

“ Alice was right. The wretched lady had expired with horror at the ferocious deed of vengeance perpetrated by her husband, who seemed only to rejoice the more, in this crowning act of his sanguinary triumph.

“ ‘ What, ho ! without there ! ’ he exclaimed, stamping with his foot violently ; when one of the three men who had invaded Alice’s cottage that night immediately entered.

“ ‘ You know your business,’ said he. ‘ Convey her back as you brought her—and, do you mark—not a word, nor even a whisper, that she can babble about.’

“ The eyes of Alice were now covered as before, and she was led forth through many a winding passage, and down numerous flights of steps, till she perceived she was in the open air. She then felt an arm tightly grasping her body, and the next moment she was mounted on a horse, behind some one whom she, in her turn, grasped as tightly. Not a word was spoken : and when she arrived at her own cottage, she was lifted off with the same silence, and the horseman instantly rode away. All she

knew was, that her escort back consisted of a single squire, instead of three cavaliers to attend her."

"And was the caitiff never brought to justice?" said De Clare.

"You shall hear," replied Vehan, "by what a subtle device the criminal was shortly after discovered. Alice, afraid to speak, while the inhuman butchery was about, or when it was accomplished, bethought her of means by which due punishment might perchance fall upon Lord Eustace. She secretly contrived to cut a piece from the rich velvet hanging of the bed, which she brought safely away with her. And now, next day, going before a magistrate, she disclosed the whole of the bloody tragedy, and related how she had possessed herself of a clue that might direct the arm of justice where it should strike. She was much commended for her shrewdness; and the enormous crime being made known to the highest officers of the law, orders were promptly given that strict and diligent search should be made, till the very house were discovered, wherein should be a bed whose

hangings corresponded with the piece which Alice had cut off, and that piece itself fitted to the very place whence it had been cut. At length they came to the princely mansion of Lord Eustace, and, where they least expected it, found the evidence they were in quest of. Potent as he was, not only in himself, but in his alliances, which stretched even to the throne, yet his offence was too crimson to let the sword of justice be turned aside. He was arraigned, tried, condemned, and, before his execution, confessed his guilt. Nor was this all. He lived long enough to learn, that a subtle fiend had, with devilish malice, abused his ear, and wrought upon his jealous nature by counterfeit proofs of his innocent lady's supposed infidelity ; and with this heavy load of bitter remorse, he laid his head upon the block !”

CHAPTER XVI.

“WHAT hissing noise is that?” said Peve-
rell, when Vehan had concluded. “I have
heard it several times.”

“I do not hear it,” replied Walwyn, listen-
ing.—“Yes!—now I do!”

“Plainly,” added De Clare, as they all sat in
silent expectation of what was to take place.

“It is here!” cried Overbury, starting up
and looking round.

The chimes went twelve. The doors of the
Abbey burst open with a tremendous sound.
They strained their eyes, to discover if any
thing approached. A loud shriek from Vehan

suddenly drew their attention towards him. He was writhing about, as if in much agony, and his countenance expressed the utmost terror.

At that moment, they beheld the head of some prodigious monster, with flaming eyes, and a triple tongue, projecting from jaws which were armed with a double row of sharp fangs, slowly rearing itself behind Vehan's chair, and glaring and hissing over his shoulders. Vehan still screamed and writhed. The table was quickly dragged away, and they then discovered the cause of his torture. The whole of the lower part of his body, his legs, thighs, and waist, were encircled by the voluminous folds of this enormous creature, whose size was vast and terrific. They could distinguish many yards of its black, glossy skin, shining along the ground, till it was lost in the obscurity of distance. In bulk, the smallest part of what was visible exceeded the circumference of an athletic man's arm, while the dimensions of that portion which was coiled round Vehan, were equal nearly to the trunk of a large tree. Its head was frightfully hideous, partaking something of the hu-

man form, but more square than oval, with two small ears standing erect, and covered with short black bristles. It continued rearing itself up, rolling and twisting its arched neck about, and gradually twining higher and higher round Vehan's body, who struggled in vain to shake off the ugly monster, or even to rise from his chair, so powerful was the constriction, and so ponderous the pressure.

"Kill it—kill it!" he exclaimed, gasping; while he strove convulsively to tear himself away.

Walwyn drew his rapier, and made an eager thrust at the monster. The point of his weapon passed through it, as if it were of no substance, but air merely, and pierced Vehan.

He groaned and fell. The others gathered round and struck at the filthy creature with their swords; but, to their horror and amazement, their edges seemed to fall upon Vehan only.

The stupendous reptile had now uncoiled itself, hissing with increased violence, and its eyes flaming like burning torches, while

they continued to aim the most furious blows at its head and neck. They were at length convinced it was either a mere phantom, or that it possessed some miraculous property of instantly closing again wherever it was wounded. They knew their swords passed through it, for they clattered against the walls and pavement. In this way they followed it half down the aisle, the creature still receding from them, and as it receded, diminishing in length, without increasing in bulk, as if, at each fold and surge which it made of its tortuous body, successive portions of it dissolved away—till at last nothing remained, but a little round black substance, which seemed to sink into the earth !

When they returned to Vehan, they found him lying on the ground, bleeding, and in the agonies of death. He had received several wounds ; but the one from which the blood streamed most profusely, and which of itself appeared sufficient to destroy life, was that given by Walwyn's rapier. It had penetrated near the heart, if not into it.

Walwyn was distracted. He knelt down by

his kinsman, wept aloud, and held his hand to his side, endeavouring to staunch the blood ; but life was ebbing fast. Vehan felt how it was with him, and grasping the hand of Walwyn affectionately, while he turned upon him a look of tender sorrow, as knowing the anguish which must possess his mind at so disastrous an accident, he gently exclaimed, " It was well meant, though sadly done—but afflict not yourself ; I already see glimpses of what is to come—and your sword was not—"

" What ?" said Walwyn, in a voice choaked with grief.

" Self-directed," added Vehan, faintly, and fell back in the arms of Walwyn who was supporting him. He never spoke again ; but after two or three heavy, long-drawn sighs, lay still and motionless.

Walwyn threw himself upon the body, and could not for several minutes be induced to quit it. He sobbed and wept, more like a child than a man. He had always felt greatly attached to Vehan ; not only as he was his kinsman, but on account of the many fine qualities

which he knew belonged to him ; and partly attracted by that ethereal disposition which made him a creature of pure intellect, almost, wedded to silent contemplation and deep musings. The thought was insupportable to him, that he had fallen, as he believed, by his hand ; for, in the first paroxysm of his grief, he never once reflected upon what had been the immediate cause of his own act, and the possible one of the event which he deplored.

It was some time before any of them could withdraw their minds from the melancholy object before them, to speak of what had occurred. De Clare at length broke silence.

“How incomprehensible it is,” said he, “that each night we have been within these walls, a life has been sacrificed !”

“That is not the only incomprehensible part of the business,” observed Lacy ; “remember the sudden closing of the doors when we entered—”

“Aye,” interrupted De Clare, “as if we were numbered for an allotted task, which needs nor fewer nor more.”

"That inference, carried to its full extent," said Peverell, "would assign us, severally, to a fate, which, with such fore-knowledge, though resting only on surmise, we should be madmen to tempt."

"I say not absolutely, what your speech aims at," replied De Clare, "but what then? Foregone events—the things we know—make up all our reasonings about what is unknown, shape them how we will."

"Yes," answered Peverell; "and if that which we are now engaged in, could be judged as we judge the common affairs of life, I should be apt enough to take the past as the fore-runner of the future; even as its very symbol and type. But we are strayers in the dark, and though we keep the path, we see neither how far we have advanced, nor how much farther we have to advance! We are all ready to exclaim at what has this night been witnessed; but wherein does it transcend in mystery, the first or second night? Wherein the manifold circumstances of each day, I might almost say of each hour, since the beginning of this

great mystery itself? We are wandering among dreams and shadows—and for my single self, I feel so entangled in the still thickening maze, that to go on seems my only chance of getting free.”

“It is even so with us all,” said Lacy; “though none of us have been singled out, as you have, from first to last.”

“Three nights more,” exclaimed De Clare, “and, if Fitz-Maurice juggle not, we shall see the last.”

“For which sight I own myself impatient—nay, almost weary,” added Peverell.

“As who amongst us is not?” replied De Clare. “Another week of such a life as this, would be too dear a price for a long course of happy years. To lie thus on the rack of apprehension—to be tossed to and fro, amid a sea of hopes, of doubts and of fears,—with once, in every circuit of the blessed sun, a scene like this which is now before us, to shake our natures, would make us lunatics, or argue us no better.”

“Well!” said Walwyn, rising from the

seat into which he had thrown himself, when gently removed from the body of Vehan; "I suppose we have completed this night's task—or rather *my* accursed hand hath offered up the bloody sacrifice! Oh, God!" he continued, while tears burst from him afresh; "how infinitely happier I should account myself, were I the stricken deer, and he the living mourner of my death!"

They endeavoured to soften the poignancy of Walwyn's grief, by reminding him, that even admitting it was the wound he had inflicted, which had caused the tragical event, still there ought to be no bitterness of self-reproach mingled with his sorrow; for his intention was not only blameless, but exemplary.

"It would be as rational," observed De Clare, "to arraign yourself as his assassin, if your kinsman had been attacked by midnight murderers, and you, in striving to save his life, had believed you killed him, by a random thrust. I say believed; for see, he hath other wounds. But if he had none, how know you that the scaly monster which enfolded him

would have quitted him unscathed? Nay, veiled, as all that happens is, how can you assure yourself, or rather how can you incline to the mere opinion, that the apparent, was the real, cause of what hath taken place?"

"Moreover," added Peverell, "did he not, as he expired, bid you not be afflicted, for that your sword was not self-directed?"

"He did," replied Walwyn, dejectedly; "and said he already saw glimpses of what was to come."

"Yes!" exclaimed De Clare, "and such prescience, or inspiration, doth often dwell within us, when our bodies are preparing for the grave, and our souls for eternity! This world recedes—the next opens before us!—Darkness descends upon the past—the brightness and the glory of the ever-living God himself falls upon the future. Man beholds not, then, in the flesh, but in the spirit: and what he speaks, it is prophetic. Do not doubt it," continued De Clare, with unwonted energy; "the last moments of the dying, are the first of everlasting life. We are then on the confines

of two worlds, and our parting agonies here are but the commencing torments of hereafter ; as the calmly expiring good man, is already rapt into beatitude, before the closing sigh which makes him immortal, breathes through his lips !”

Walwyn derived as much comfort as the mind ever derives from mere exhortations to be comforted. The consolation that really finds its way to a mourning heart, is either borne upon the wings of time, or created out of considerations and circumstances, known only to the heart that mourns. All else settles in the ear merely, and seems to do the office it assumes, because it withdraws the attention from the cause of grief ; but it leaves the grief itself undisturbed.

It now became necessary to consider what should be done that night with the body of Vehan ; when Walwyn himself proposed the course, which at once suggested itself to all, though no one liked to mention it ; and that was, to leave it in the Abbey till the morning. This was accordingly done ; De Clare, Peverell,

Lacy, and mine host, assisting to place it on chairs. The countenance was extremely placid, and the blood had ceased to flow from any of the wounds.

As they retired, Walwyn leaned over the body, and kissed the forehead. The doors were already open, and Peverell found no difficulty now in locking them.

They had scarcely proceeded a hundred yards from the Abbey, when Mortimer observed, with one of his usual protestations, they "had left their sea-calf behind, Overbury."

"Did he not come out with us?" said De Clare.

"If he did, where is he?" answered Hoskyns, looking round: "the moon is bright, and we should see him."

"Hang him!" exclaimed De Clare; "it were no sin, but a good deed, to leave him there; especially if there were a chance of not finding him in the morning."

"What shall we do?" said Owen Rees.

"I know not," replied De Clare, "except

that I would not turn my head to look after him. He must have ensconced himself in some dark corner, o'ercome with drink ; or we should have seen him as we left the Abbey."

" Here," said Peverell, addressing mine host, " take the keys, run back, and open the doors for him."

" The lights are all out," cried Wintour, " and I shall not be able to see him."

" Roar to him, then," said Mortimer ; " and if you do not wake him with your own sweet voice, the echo of it along those aisles will be sure to do it for you."

" I shall not go further than the door, as I am a vintner," quoth mine host, receiving the key. " And you'll wait for me ?"

" Aye," replied De Clare ; " we will wait, an' you keep us not too long."

" I warrant I'll not do that ; for I shall roar but thrice, I promise you." And mine host hastened back, with all the speed which his short legs, and seven inches of fat on the kidneys, would allow.

He opened the door, and " Hallo ! hallo !

Wilfrid Overbury !” quoth he. No answer ; but the echo of his own voice, which he liked not. “ What ! ho ! Mister Overbury ! Come out—you are in the dark—and we are all gone !” Still only hollow reverberations, which seemed to mine host as if there were more voices than his ; and he drew back the leg which, at first, he had manfully put over the threshold. He held the door fast, leaving just space enough for his mouth. “ I say !” quoth he, “ you had better not sleep there—you will catch cold—we can’t wait !” Mine host now heard something—a sort of rustling noise—but, it occurred to him, it was as likely to be Vehan as Overbury ; nay, more likely ; for he knew the one was in the Abbey, and was not sure that the other was. So he locked the door, and made the best of his way back.

“ He is not there,” quoth he, returning the keys to Peverell, and puffing as if he had been running for a wager, two miles upon uneven ground.

“ Not there !” said Peverell.

"You heard me call, didn't you?" quoth mine host.

"No," replied Mortimer, "we did not."

"Well then, you might," answered Win-tour; "for I roared loud enough, and three times, too; but could not make any body hear."

"My life upon it," said De Clare, "he reeled out, soon after the doors flew open, while we were gathered round Vehan; and ere this, he snores away the fumes of the wine he drank, in his bed."

"It must be so, I think," replied Peverell, "or he would certainly have heard the hailing of mine host, whose pipe is no virgin's delicate treble."

"Oh, it is so," added Mortimer; "and if 'twere not, having saved our manners by that to which mine host can testify, I protest I, for one, shall not sleep the worse, for any trouble it will give me as to where that lump of live pitch sticks for the night."

It was no longer doubted that De Clare's conjecture was right, and that Overbury had

slunk away, unperceived, soon after the bursting open of the doors. This was the more readily concluded, too, because no one remembered to have seen him subsequently to his starting up, when they first heard the hissing of the monster before it became visible. They therefore continued their progress to that part of the town where they usually separated for their respective homes.

"How is it to be to-morrow?" said Lacy. "Shall we meet at an early hour, now to be appointed, or leave it to be determined by circumstances?"

"I would recommend neither," replied De Clare, "but rather this: to re-assemble at your house, by seven o'clock to-morrow evening, certainly; or, at any hour before that time, if there be need."

This was at once assented to, and they separated.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was early the next morning, and before Peverell had sat down to his breakfast, that he was surprised by a summons to hasten, with all speed, to *The Rose*. The messenger was no further explicit, except that his manner was an ample index to a dismal volume.

Peverell lost not a moment in obeying what appeared to be so urgent a call; and when he arrived at *The Rose*, he was soon satisfied he had not been bidden forth upon light grounds. To his equal horror and surprise, he learned that mine host had been found lifeless in his bed that morning, and that the Venetian youth,

or, as Tim the ostler expressed himself, "the gypsy vagrarium had absconded." No noise had been heard in the course of the night, by those who slept in the house ; and it was supposed the murderer must have escaped out of window, for none of the doors were unbarred.

"Then how do you know he *has* absconded?" said Peverell.

"We have hunted in every hole and corner," replied Tim, brandishing a pitch-fork, "and if we had found him, wouldn't I have stuck him like a rat, or a mad dog?"

"Where did he sleep?" continued Peverell.

"Here, an' please you," answered Tim, pointing to a truckle bed, in a dark closet, which opened from the passage in which they were standing.

"And where did your master sleep?"

"Above," quoth Tim.

"Were any bolts or locks broken to get into his chamber?"

"None;" said a plump, black-eyed wench, who sat crying in a corner; "my master was



never wont to lock his door ; for I used to go to him, after he was a-bed, sometimes, to ask him if he wanted anything."

"Hold the tongue, fool !" said Tim, as if he felt a laudable anxiety for the preservation of family secrets. Mine host was a bachelor.

"I only speak the truth," replied Lucy ; "I never found any difficulty in getting into my master's room."

"I know thee didst not," quoth Tim, with a grin.

"What hath been stolen ?" inquired Peverell.

"Nothing, as we can discover," answered Tim. "If a mouse only had ascended, it would have left more marks behind it of breaking out."

Peverell now ascended to the chamber of Wintour, and found mine host a corpse in his bed. There was no blood on the clothes, nor any signs of violence about the person of Wintour, except two black marks on each side of his throat, and a livid appearance of his countenance, as if he had been strangled. It must

have been done, too, with a powerful grasp, producing instant suffocation almost; for he lay as if he had died without struggling, and the bed clothes were not at all disturbed.

“ Who saw him last, alive ?” said Peverell.

“ I did not see him alive,” answered Tim, “ after he went out yesternight, to go to the Abbey, I believe; when he told me to have the crop-ear’d pony ready by sun-rise, for he had business at Dunstable to-day, and must start with the dawn.”

“ Who was up, when he returned from the Abbey ?” continued Peverell.

“ I, an’ you please, Sir,” said Lucy, with a curtsey.

“ Was the stranger in bed, then ?”

“ Yes, an’ please you !”

“ They did not see each other, nor hold any conversation together ?”

“ No, an’ please, you !”

“ And your master then went to bed ?”

“ Yes, an’ please you !”

“ And that was the last you saw of him ?”

“ No, an’ please you !”

“ I mean,” continued Peverell, “ that was the last time you saw him alive ?”

“ No, an’ please you !” said Lucy, rolling up one corner of her apron, with downcast eyes and scarlet cheeks.

“ Did *you* go to bed soon after ?” added Peverell, who now began to penetrate Lucy’s equivocation.

“ Yes, an’ please you, Sir !”

“ Do you sleep alone ?” inquired Peverell.

“ Sometimes, an’ please you, Sir !”

“ Did you sleep alone last night ?”

“ I was afraid, an’ please you, Sir ! on account of the strange man who was in the house.”

“ And therefore you crept, for company and comfort—”

“ Yes, an’ please you, Sir !” and the apron was rolled up with both thumbs at once.

“ Now tell me, wench,” said Peverell ; “ for it may import much to know the fact, what was the latest hour at which you saw this poor man alive ?”

“ About four o’clock, an’ please you !” replied Lucy, with a very sheepish air.

“ And then—”

“ And then,” she continued, “ I went to bed and fell asleep.”

“ That is, you went to your *own* bed,” added Peverell.

“ Yes, an’ please you, Sir !” replied Lucy, with her everlasting bob, for a curtsy.

Tim, and the drawer, who was also present, listened to this confession with a salacious leer, not unmixed with an expression of coarse triumph, as if some recollections of rejected advances were appeased by Lucy’s unexpected disclosure. Peverell, meanwhile, proceeded to examine the room in which he then was; and afterwards other parts of the house; but he could not discover any one circumstance which helped to explain either the motives of the assassin, or the manner of his escape. It was clear, from Lucy’s account, that the murder must have been perpetrated at an advanced hour of the morning; and it was equally clear, that plunder was not the murderer’s object, for no one drawer, or strong place had been broken open; not even a

purse, which lay on a table in Wintour's room, had been touched.

What, then, could have been the inducement? He inquired particularly, whether any angry words had passed between mine host and the youth, knowing upon what slight provocation life was often sacrificed, by the vindictive and quick-resenting natives of the country whence he came; but he learned, on the contrary, as indeed Wintour had himself told him, that the silent and gloomy Venetian had scarcely spoken to any one the whole evening, and had retired early to his pallet.

The only thing that remained for Peverell to do was to hasten to the mayor, inform him of the atrocious deed, and, through his authority, despatch scouts in every direction, to overtake the heartless criminal, who had thus requited kindness and hospitality. He could not help reflecting, as he proceeded along, upon the narrow escape he had probably had himself, when he so earnestly pressed the youth to accept the shelter of his roof. The mayor had a similar

feeling, when Peverell acquainted him with the murder ; for he, too, urged him to remain : and they both concluded, that wherever he had slept, the same catastrophe would have taken place, inasmuch as there was no one circumstance which led them to suppose he either had, or could have had, a cause of personal enmity towards poor Wintour.

The mayor was prompt in taking the necessary steps for the pursuit and apprehension of the murderer, and in less than half an hour there were six or eight active, daring fellows, scouring the adjacent country in as many different directions.

“ I have no manner of doubt,” said he, “ that I shall have him before me again, ere sunset ; and I pray God I may : for homicide is a grievous crime, under any shape ; but here, its complexion is black, indeed. Who would have thought his crocodile tears, and that filed oration of his, were masks covering so deformed and foul a heart ? Marry, and I would not swear, as things now look, that he did not kill

his own father ! Well, well ; we do not often mend first thoughts ; and if I had taken counsel from mine own poor Jack Wintour, honest Jack Wintour, as I have ever heard mine host of *the Rose* called, would now be mine host still ; for, verily, I had more than a month's mind to send the varlet to prison at once."

"And if you had," replied Peverell, "though as it may now seem, (but which you cannot know) you would have prevented a most sinful deed, yet would you have done wrong then ; for, it is justice, that no man who is accused, shall be condemned unheard."

"But see how great a good would have been obtained, at the expense of a little wrong," rejoined his worship.

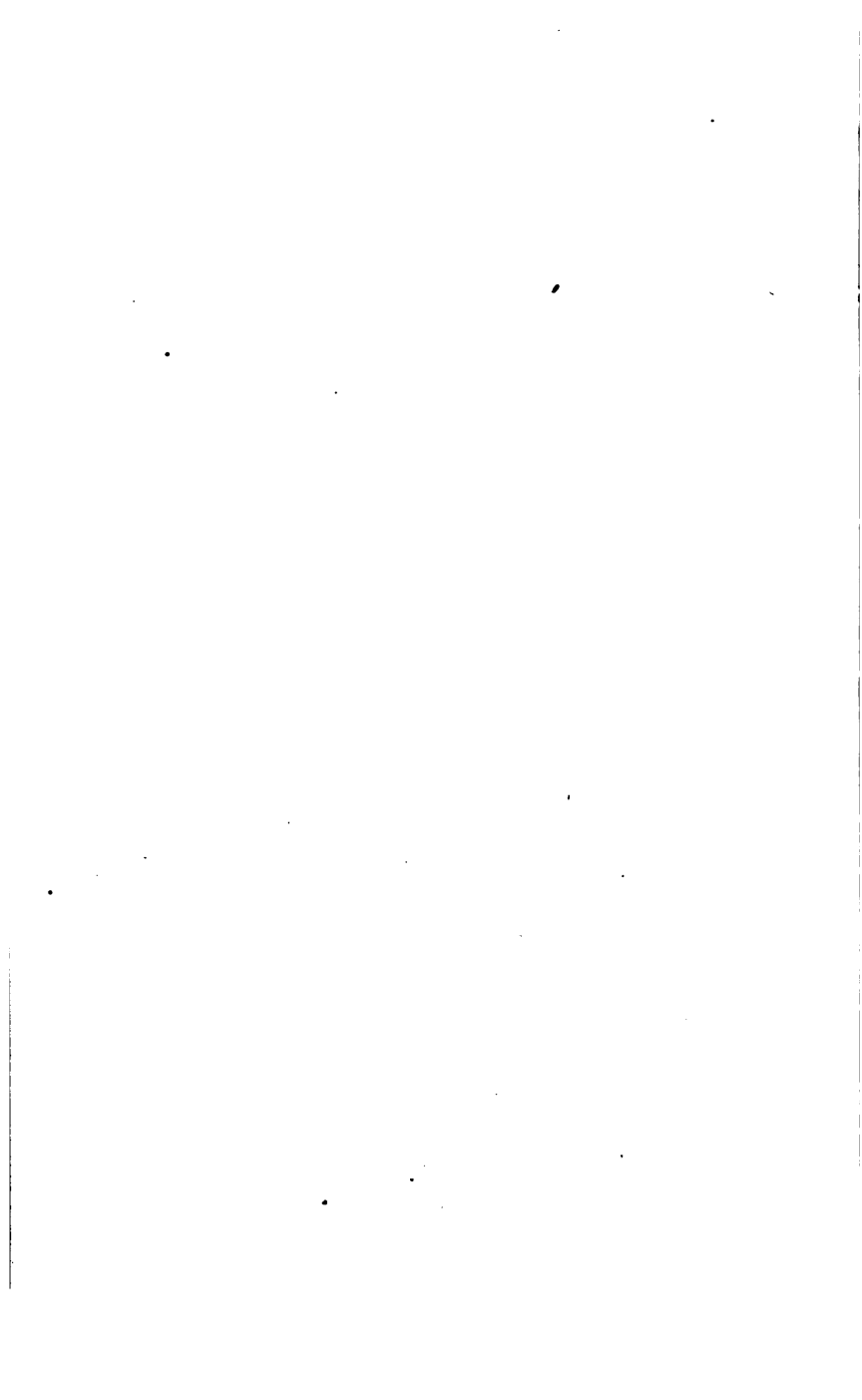
"Not a little wrong," said Peverell, "to deny another the exercise of his lawful right, in the very moment when he has most need of what service it can do him. How would your argument have told last night ? Then, you must have rejoiced to think you did not take counsel from your first thoughts, but, on the contrary,

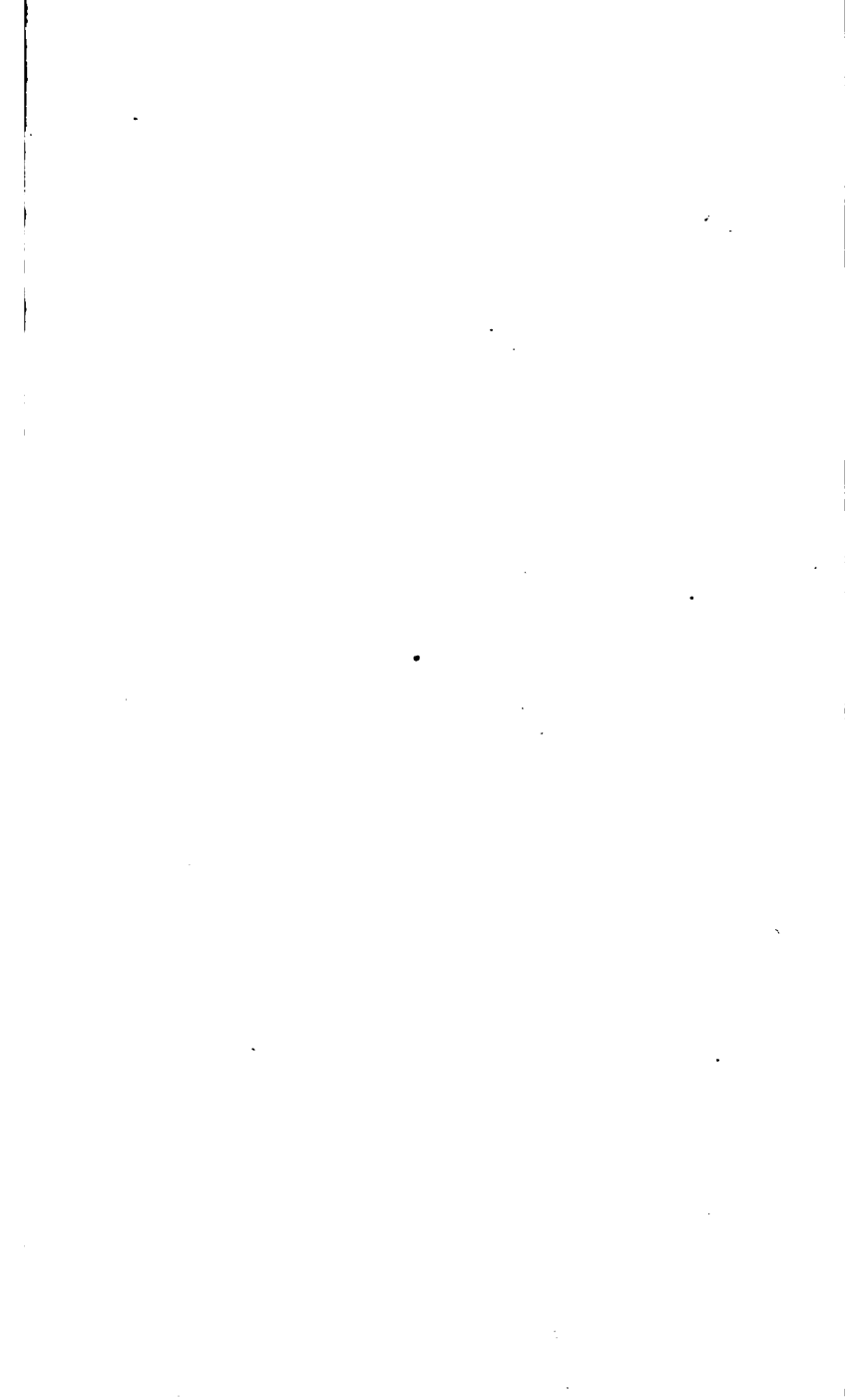
granted the common privilege to the culprit; for, by hearing him, you administered strict justice. It is for omnipotence only, to whom all time is one eternal present, to shape what is, by what shall be. Man is presumptuous when, upon his purblind glimpses of to-morrow, he dares do wrong to-day; and most weak, if, doing right to-day, he would wish it undone, for any knowledge that to-morrow brings."

His worship did not seem to be much edified by the somewhat subtile casuistry of Peverell, for he still insisted "it would have been most fortunate if he had sent sent the fellow to prison, right or wrong." And Peverell was as little satisfied with his worship's view of the case; for he believed, that if the Venetian were indeed the murderer of Wintour, his purpose did not hang by so slight a thread as the chance of what might be the effect of any thing he should say in his own defence. There appeared, indeed, to be a singular chain of circumstances in the business, when connected altogether, from the first act, of robbery, to the last, of murder; and

disciplined as his mind had lately been, by seeming accidents, which had turned out premeditated contrivances, he half persuaded himself that Wintour's death was a veiled mystery.

END OF VOL. II.





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